RAY CUMMINGS HAROLD LAWLOR

MAY

Weird Tales

15¢

THE PLACE WITH MANY WINDOWS - - - A. V. HARDING

"...and all of them looked upon death..."

When you're in line for his COLD—Look Out!

Gargle
LISTERINE ANTISEPTIC
Quick!

Germs reduced up to 96.7% in tests

IF YOU have been in close contact with other people who have colds, or if your feet get wet or cold, or if you have been exposed to sudden changes of temperature, it's only sensible to gargle with Listerine Antiseptic as promptly as possible.

Guard Against Mass Invasion of Germs

Such exposure may lower body resistance so that germs called the "secondary invaders" find it easier to invade the throat tissue and produce many of those miserable aspects of a cold you know so well. Listerine Antiseptic reaches back on the throat surfaces to kill millions of these "secondary invaders."

In tests, germs on throat and mouth surfaces were reduced as much as 96.7% fifteen minutes after the Listerine Antiseptic gargle; as much as 80% one hour after. You can see why it can help Nature in guarding against a mass invasion of germs.

Fewer Colds in Tests

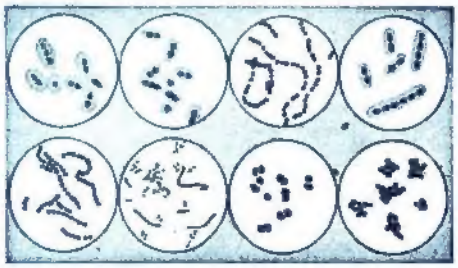
Bear in mind Listerine Antiseptic's impressive record made in tests over 12 years: Those who gargled with Listerine Antiseptic twice a day had fewer colds and usually milder colds than those who did not gargle . . . and fewer sore throats.

So, remember, at the first hint of a cold, use Listerine Antiseptic. Better still, make the Listerine Antiseptic gargle a morning-and-night habit.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, *St. Louis, Mo.*

"SECONDARY INVADERS," Potential Troublemakers

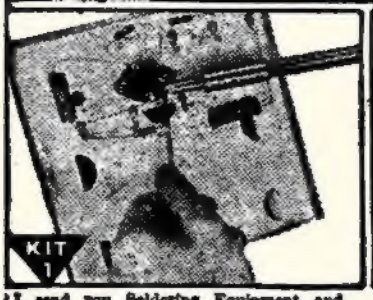
These are some types of the threatening germs, which can cause so much of the misery of a cold when they invade the throat membranes and which may be transmitted to you in droplets of moisture if you get in the way of a sneeze or a cough.



TOP ROW, left to right: Pneumococcus Type III, Pneumococcus Type IV, Streptococcus viridans, Friedlander's bacillus. BOTTOM ROW, left to right: Streptococcus hemolyticus, Bacillus influenzae, Micrococcus catarrhalis, Staphylococcus aureus.

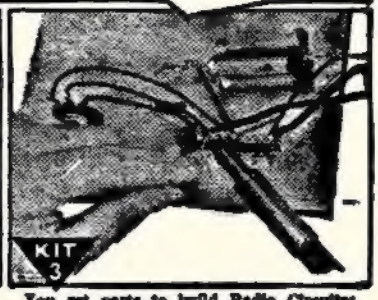
I Will Show You How to Learn RADIO by Practicing in Spare Time

I Send You Big Kits of Radio Parts

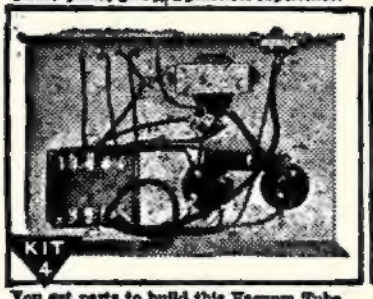


I send you Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts; show you how to do Radio soldering; how to mount and connect Radio parts; give you practical experience.

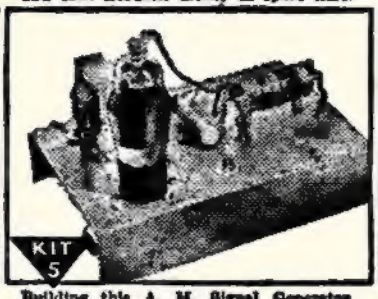
Early in my course I show you how to build this N.R.I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



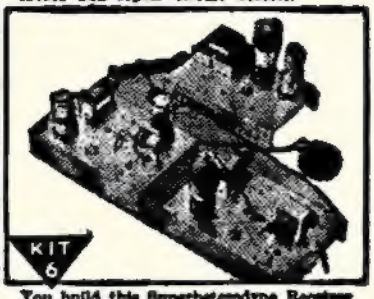
You get parts to build Radio Circuits; then test them; see how they work; learn how to design special circuits; how to locate and repair circuit defects.



You get parts to build this Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with packs of many kinds; learn to correct power pack troubles.



Building this A. M. Signal Generator gives you more valuable experience. It provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments.



You build this Superheterodyne Receiver which brings in local and distant stations—and gives you more experience to help you win success in Radio.

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City..... Zone..... State.....

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

MAY, 1947 Cover by Matt Fox

NOVELETTES

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The dead there are who should be alive, and alive are things that should be dead!

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When the tide of carnival reaches full flood the Evil Being it is who rides the crest

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A pageant of the past with shady images bent on a monstrous, timeless evil

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Modern "larnin'" up against ancient knowledge—with the Devil take the loser!

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SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS . . . . . **Irwin J. Weill** 23

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Except for personal experiences, the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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PRINTED IN THE U. S. A. 173 Vol. 39, No. 11

D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*

I Have Lived Before—

Says Aged Lama

CAN WE RECOLLECT OUR PAST LIVES?

IS THERE a strange familiarity about people you have met for the first time? Do scenes and places you have never visited haunt your memory? Are these proof that the personality—an immaterial substance—can survive all earthly changes *and return?* How many times have you seemed a *stranger to yourself*—possessed of moods and temperaments that were not your own?

Prejudices, fears, and superstitions have denied millions of men and women a fair and intelligent insight into these *yesterdays of their lives.* But in the enigmatic East, along the waters of the once sacred Nile, and in the heights of the Himalayas, man began a serious search beyond this veil of today. For centuries, behind monastery walls and in secret grottoes, certain men explored *the memory of the soul.* Liberating their consciousness from the physical world to which it is ordinarily bound, these investigators went on *mystical* journeys into celestial realms. They have expressed their experiences in simple teachings. They have disclosed whereby man can glean the true nature of self and find a *royal road* to peace of mind and resourceful living.

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REVELATIONS IN BLACK, an initial collection by Carl Jacobi, including the famed title story, *Phantom Brass, Cosmic Teletype, The Face in the Wind, A Pair of Swords, The Coach on the Ring,* and 15 others. A remarkably fine collection! $3.00

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A New Collection

PUBLISHED February 11th by the Herald Publishing Company of New York was Jack Snow's "Dark Music," a collection of fantasy fiction edited by Louis Greenfield.

The volume contains eighteen stories, only four of which have previously appeared in print, making this book something new for even the most widely read fans of weird fiction.

Incidentally we're pleased to note that those four previously published pieces of Jack Snow's "Dark Music" all appeared in WEIRD; two some twenty years ago and two within the last year or two. As you readers know, Jack is the new author of the famous "Oz" books in addition to being a WEIRD TALES contributor.

NEW MEMBERS

Herbert Morrison, 706 South Jefferson St., Muncie, Ind.
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Gordon Carr, 3 Arnold Ave., Salvesville, Rhode Island
Paul Thompson, 4201 You St., Sacramento, California
P. J. Plunkett, 891 Honeypot Lane, Standmore, Middlesex, England

READERS' VOTE

THE LIFTED VEIL	THE PLACE WITH MANY WINDOWS
MASKED BALL	
MISTRESS SARY	THE CORBIE DOOR
LOUP-GAROU	THE BLACK MADONNA
THE TRAP	

Here's a list of eight stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and send it to us.

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Howard K. Myers, 5040 Novgorod Ave., Los Angeles, California
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Robert M. Gavett, 459 Preble Street, South Portland, Maine

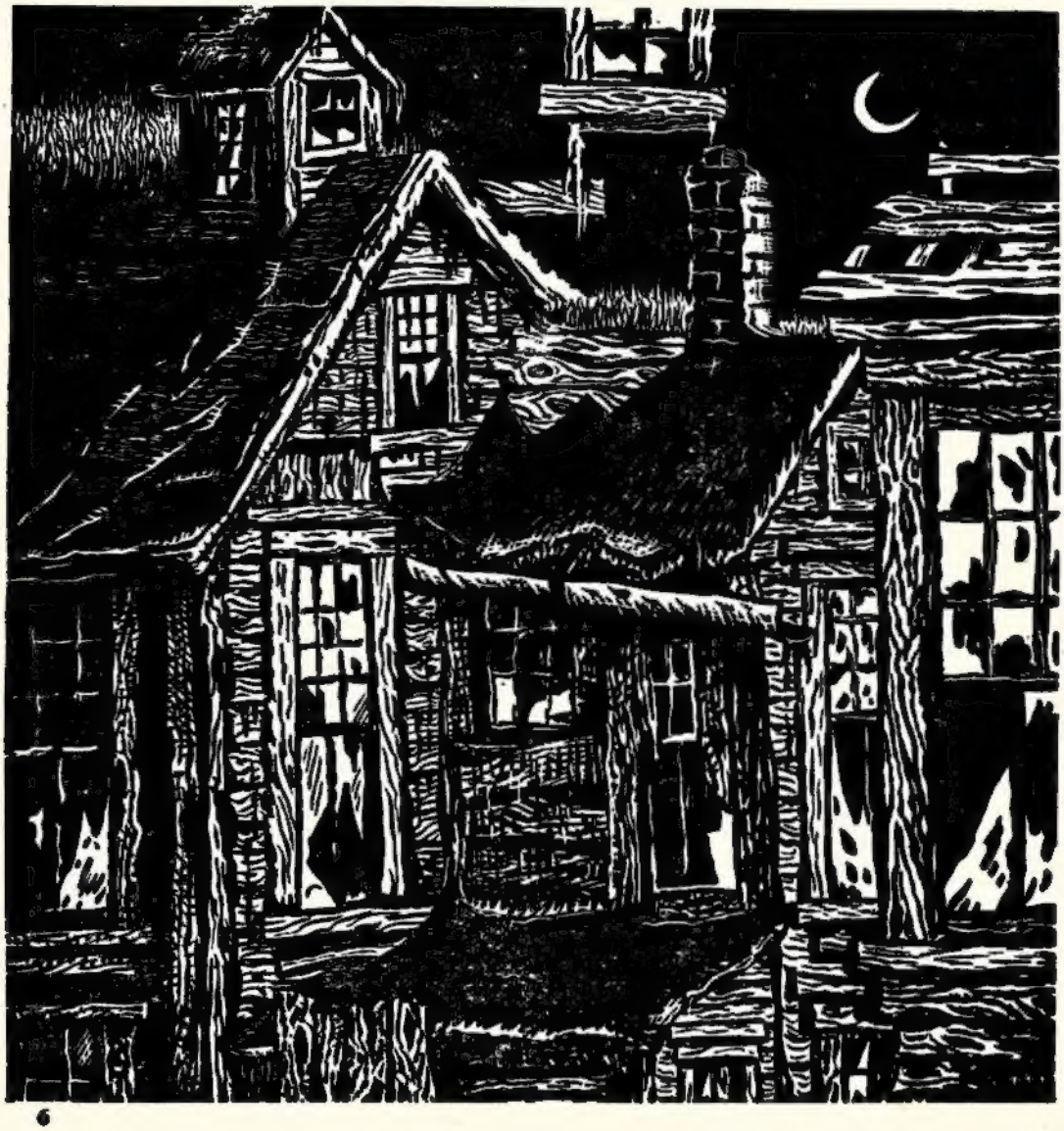
We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.

The Place With Many Windows

IT WAS entirely natural that I picked Glenwood to settle in. To pick up the threads of civilian life after more than four turbulent years in the Service—unpleasant years they were too—and to resume my private practice.

Glenwood, like so many small rural communities in this country, needed a physician badly, and the County Medical Society had so informed me. I rented a tiny cottage twelve minutes' drive from the village and settled myself to wait for business. I

Windows let in light; light is supposed to keep away evil. . . .



BY ALLISON V. HARDING

thought it would neither particularly help nor harm my practice here in Glenwood that there had been a Dr. Williams some years before, an older man, I was told.

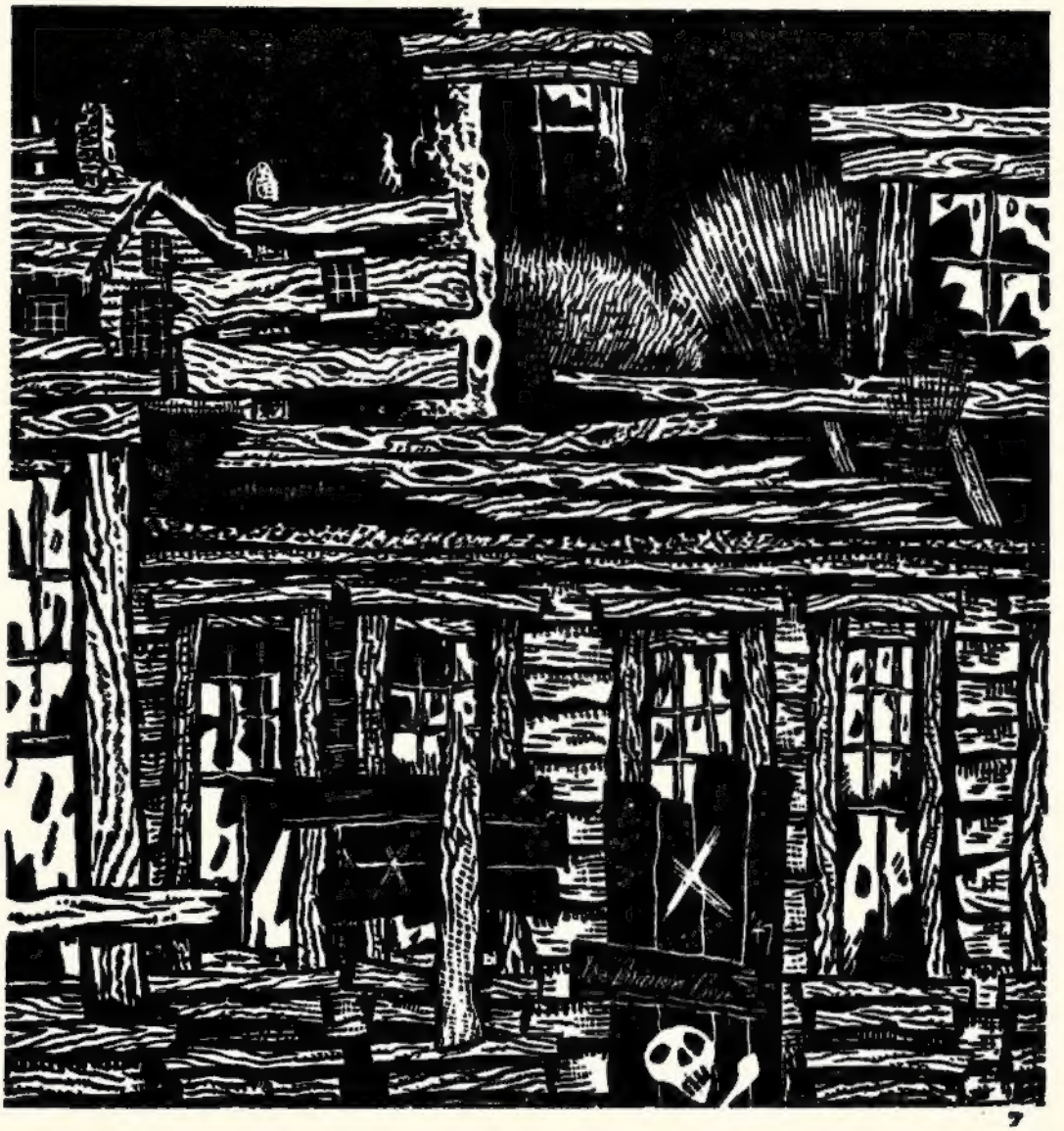
"Dr. Joshua Williams," said one of the town's talkative females to me between complaints about her gout. "Young man, your name is much nicer," she pronounced and added with all the coyness of a sixty-year-old, "and besides, you're much nicer looking."

My white shingle with the green letters, Dr. Edward Williams, M. D., had been up less than a month when I got a hurry call from the town clerk and deputy, Fred Bryson.

A strange accident had been reported, Bryson told me excitedly over the phone. Somebody had been hurt. Would I drive over and meet him at the old factory right away?

"You know the place," the deputy

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE



directed. "It's in the valley just t'other side of the reservoir."

I hung up, checked the contents of my bag, threw a heavy muffler around my neck under my greatcoat against the March night, snapped the lights of the cottage out behind me and stepped through the front door. It was particularly clear. The air stung my nostrils and it was good to breathe deeply. As I unhinged the garage door, I heard clearly the church steeple bells chiming eleven. Three kicks of the starter fired my second-hand sedan to life. I turned on the lights and circled out of the gravel driveway into the road that led to the reservoir.

Bryson had mentioned nothing other than he wanted me. I knew no details. A doctor starting to practice in a new locality goes when he's summoned and where he's summoned. I thought there would be worse times for a near-midnight call too, for tonight it was good to be out.

A FEW minutes more on the black tar road and I'd reached the causeway that dissected the reservoir almost exactly in half. The run of road was very straight and quite long and it was as though the pine trees swishing by were themselves moving and not I. A reservoir at night in the winter is the loneliest possible place, I reflected. No one has any business with it in the dark and even the summer quota of parking lovers is a cold-weather casualty. Almost unconsciously I increased speed and soon saw the fork in the road at the other side, the right branch of which would take me to my destination.

I knew what Bryson meant by the factory. That was a neighborhood name for a building which I remember very well passing on one of my exploration drives around the town. In fact, I had gone out of my way to drive past it and certainly not because of any beauty. The factory was not pretty. It was grotesque and it was completely out of place, situated as it was in the soft rolling valley beyond the reservoir. I felt I was nearing my destination even before my headlights picked up the first outlandish shadows of the edifice, even before I spotted the two cars standing outside where, ordinarily, no cars would be, as the factory had been unused now for a good many years.

I pulled off the road behind the auto with the shield marked "Marshal." I turned out my headlights and got out. It seemed to have turned colder and darker since I'd left home a few minutes earlier, but of course that must have been the effect of lessened circulation and cramped muscles after my drive. There was some moon, and by its cold light I picked my way across frozen ground towards the building. It was as forbidding, yes, more so at night than it was in the daytime. It was a long irregular sprawl of a structure, two stories high, of rude planking, gray-painted, with short summits of eccentric peaked roofing at the top. The most striking feature was the windows. It was laughable. It was curious.

It was outré all at once. Not any one window, you will understand, but the many of them, built often side by side for the whole height of a floor, side by side stretching the full length of the building as though by someone, I thought, who knew nothing about construction or who had some strange unfathomable reason.

I found the door, an almost apologetic panel, a small thing wedged in by masonry between the towering panes on either side and above it, and as I turned the handle to go in, I thought the silly little thought that here was surely a paradise for boys with stones or half-eaten apples.

"That you, Doc?" a voice hailed from inside. I yessed as I crossed the threshold.

The inside had a musty smell as though of something shut off by itself from the world for a long time, accentuated no doubt by the clear pure outside I'd forsaken. A flashlight beam flicked up, brightened me for a minute and then directed itself at the rough floorboards, guiding me.

"Over here."

As I stepped closer I saw four figures outlined by the several flashlight beams playing around. One I recognized as Fred Bryson, the town clerk and deputy who'd called me; the other was the marshal, and to one side was the silent figure of a man, and at his side a girl, torchlight slanting off the curling lines of her hair.

My eyes were attracted by the something on the floor then between the marshal and Bryson. I came closer and bent over. It was a man. By the looks of him about fifty, dressed too well for a tramp. His face was beaten into an unrecognizable pulp.

"This man's dead," I pronounced after detecting no pulse beat or cardiac sounds with my stethescope.

"Thought so," said the marshal. "Look at his head."

I had. It wasn't pleasant. The whole left side and rear was bashed in as though from some tremendous blow. He had died instantly, of course. I turned the man up on one shoulder slightly to see the broken cranium area better under the flashlight. I heard a sigh and a sick little sound from the girl in the shadows. I turned my head questioningly.

"That's Phyllis Jenkins and her father," Bryson explained to me in a low voice. "They live across the way, heard some noise, investigated and called me. Well, I'll get the stretcher from the car," the deputy went on. "We'll take him back to town."

THE marshal had stepped over and was methodically going through the dead man's pockets. I heard Bryson saying to the girl in the shadows, "No sense in your hanging around, Mr. Jenkins, and your daughter there. We'll get in touch with you in the morning."

The old man answered, "You go along with Deputy Bryson, Phyllis. He'll see you across the road. I want to have a word with the marshal."

I heard the twin footsteps outside as Bryson and the Jenkins girl went out into the night. Then Mr. Jenkins came clumping over.

The marshal had turned up nothing by way of identification. The other man tugged at his shoulder.

"Marshal," said Jenkins. "I know who it is."

"*You* know!"

"Yes. It's Garth. Bert Garth."

The marshal looked at Jenkins for a long moment. "You're crazy," he replied almost vehemently and got to his feet. I rose to. The conversation meant little to me at this point.

"Know how I know?" Jenkins was triumphant. He raised the dead man's left hand, indicated the second finger, the first joint of which was missing. "That's Bert Garth. Same build, same way of dressing . . . and the end off his second finger missing."

"You're crazy!" the marshal said again.

BUT I thought his face looked suddenly gray in the torchlight. I stood there feeling strangely remote to this scene, watching the two men staring at each other.

"All right, Marshal, have it you own way," Jenkins turned and headed for the door.

"We'll want you downtown in the morning," the marshal called after him.

"Be there," and Jenkins was gone.

I cleared my throat almost as though I felt it were necessary to remind Marshal Stokes of my presence.

"It's not easy to identify someone smashed up like this chap," I offered, "but that Jenkins seemed so sure. Garth, is that what he said?"

"T'ain't so," Stokes turned angry eyes on me. "Can't be."

I shrugged my shoulders. It was all one to me.

"I should think some identification would be better than none," I suggested.

"So it would be, Doc." The marshal's pale face was turned away from me, listening as though waiting to hear Bryson's returning steps. "See, there's one catch and Jenkins knows it as well as I do. There's a cemetery across the road from this here factory and in that cemetery is a headstone. It's been there over five years and it's got Bert Garth's name on it. I recollect it was your namesake, Dr. Joshua Williams, who tended to him that five years ago. Men don't die twice, do they, Doc?"

I felt the prickling in my body then. What he'd said and the way he looked. That broken body at our feet. The gloomy, evil old factory stretching out around us far beyond the weak rays of our small flashlights.

Then Bryson burst in with the stretcher and we three carried the man out and placed him along the top of the seats in the marshal's car.

"You be into the town hall at ten tomorrow morning, eh Doc?"

I NODDED to Stokes and waved my hand goodnight to Bryson. They headed off towards the town and I got into my sedan to turn around towards home. I backed and filed into a driveway, and as I did, my headlights fell across a cluster of tombstones in a square set back not far from the road and opposite the factory. The cemetery Marshal Stokes had spoken of—with a grave and tombstone for Bert Garth, the man who'd died again tonight!

Also as I turned, the outreaches of my lights touched upon a small brown-shingled house set off further down the road. The Jenkins, no doubt, and I thought of the strange, so-positive man and his daughter. All I saw of her was a shock of black lustrous curls and a face that somehow managed to be pretty in spite of the horror written on it. I had turned my car and was about to shift into first when I saw a wig-wagging beam of light approaching me from the side.

My first impulse was to step hard on the gas, then I chided myself. The light came from the direction of the Jenkins' house.

I waited and the beam was upon me, behind it a running figure. I saw then in the luminance of my own headlights that it was the girl, Phyllis. She came to the driver's window, breathing hard with running.

"Dr. Williams! I'm so glad I caught you! It's my father."

I thrust the thought that she was strikingly beautiful from me and concentrated on the professional problem at hand.

"What is it, Miss Jenkins? What about your father?"

Her hand over the side of the car was clenched to a whiteness.

"He's been so restless. Says that was Garth and that the others are back too." She gestured towards the cemetery.

"The others?"

"Yes. My father used to work at the factory. Mr. Garth was one of the owners, but they all died. At least—" she stopped. "What I wondered was if I could have something to give my father to make him sleep. He's so excited and he keeps talking about going back to the factory."

Instinctively I patted her hand, then I searched around in my bag and came up with what I wanted. I gave her the two yellow capsules.

"Here's a mild sedative and sleeping potion, Miss Jenkins. You get your father to take one of these and then if he's still restless after an hour, give him another. I think that'll give him a good night's sleep."

Phyllis Jenkins' face framed in the window was grateful. Her smile was the first pleasant thing in the last disagreeable hour.

"Thank you, Doctor."

She stood back from the car to let me drive on. Another thought struck me. I felt a sympathy for this girl. The experience tonight which she'd witnessed, her father's eccentricities and living here in this particular place.

"You have a phone, don't you?"

She nodded.

"Well, my number is—" I recited it. "If you're nervous about your father, feel free to call me."

She nodded and her eyes were soft and said thank you.

"You'll be able to get back to the house all right? I'd really like to—" I made as if to get out the door.

She placed a firm capable hand on my arm. "Please, Doctor, don't. It's just a step. You've been very kind. Goodnight," and she walked swiftly off down the road towards her home.

I sped away into the night towards my own cottage, turning the queer affair of the man who'd seemingly died twice over in my mind and thinking, I must confess, more than once of Phyllis Jenkins.

IT WAS a grim meeting the next morning at Town Hall. Mr. Jenkins looking as though he hadn't slept in spite of my pills stuck stoutly to his story that the disfigured dead man was, in truth, Bert Garth. Marshal Stokes listened tight-lipped, twirling a gold penknife at the end of its chain around his finger again and again. Bryson paced up and down, stopping occasionally to make notes in one of the village record

books. A selectman was also present, myself, and Phyllis Jenkins.

It was the first time I'd seen the girl—really seen her—for last night's memories of her were shrouded in the darkness of that night itself. Her hair was dark brown, naturally wavy, brushed back enough to show the intelligent forehead above well-set lovely eyes. Her mouth was a little stern, but then we were here on no humorous purpose this day. She was of medium height with a perfectly proportioned curvaceous figure that attested to her country upbringing and healthful living. She was, in one banal word, beautiful.

I do not consider myself a particularly susceptible man by nature, but it was hard for me not to make myself obvious with my looks in her direction. I was worried, too, about the condition of her father. He was in a highly agitated state. He repeated his story of how he heard noises in the factory, investigated and found the man—Garth, he insisted excitedly and with nervous bursts of speed. Twice Bryson had to stop him and ask him to repeat some detail.

I filled out the prescribed form dealing with cause of death, signed my name. I had to admit as a physician that it would have been possible for the deceased to have stumbled, tripped in the dark so to speak, and fallen, hitting his head on one of the abutments or old tool platforms in the factory's interior.

Despite Jenkins' opposition, the case was closed, Marshal Stokes dictating that "an unidentified man was found dead, presumably the result of an accident at approximately 10:45 p.m., in the reservoir road factory."

We came out of the town hall chamber in a body, and Jenkins tried to buttonhole one after another, first the marshal, then Bryson, then the selectman. I thought they retreated, nay, fled, rather abruptly from the agitated man. Finally, he turned to me, and for Phyllis' sake standing there beside him obviously perturbed, I hesitated.

"Doctor," he pleaded, "you must believe me. There's something untoward going on in that place. It's an evil place, Doctor. It was built on land where nothing should have been built, but there's more to it than that. *They* know," he gestured towards the vanishing figures of the officials, "that what I say is so. They know, Doctor, that man we found there last night was Garth!"

He smiled, not humor but bitterness, and his face came closer to mine. "Thing is, they don't want to prod into this too close, Doctor. There's murder here, but there's worse. Things from beyond the grave. Things from beyond the Beyond!"

I felt called upon to lay a soothing arm on Jenkins' shoulder.

"Now, now," I said. "You've done all you could. Marshal Stokes has decided the case has closed. Don't fret about it anymore, Mr. Jenkins. You're only harming yourself and," I turned towards Phyllis, "your daughter. Let matters rest where they are."

"But rest they won't, my boy," he countered. "There's things going on. This was just the beginning. I know Garth. I saw him a hundred times, a thousand times before they said he died. You see, he didn't die."

"But Deputy Bryson tells me there's a death certificate made out for him in the town records. He's buried in that cemetery opposite the factory."

"And who made out the certificate?" queried Jenkins, a cunning look coming into his eyes.

"Why, a doctor," I stated. "It was all perfectly in order."

"And the doctor's tombstone's in the cemetery along with the rest of them!"

I TRIED not to show surprise.

"Well," I said after a moment. "I guess there's nothing for it. You're a taxpayer and I'm just the country doctor." I attempted to pass it off lightly. "We don't have much standing around here, Mr. Jenkins. Those others do the deciding." My weak joke fell flat.

"There'll be more things come to pass," he shook his head. "C'mon, Phyllis." He turned and walked towards their car.

She obeyed, and as she turned away, I caught the little smile meant for me. It was appreciation for trying to quiet him down. Even if it didn't work, you tried, so thanks, it said.

I watched the two, the agitated father walking along slightly bent though he was

barely past middle-age and the well-built handsome figure of his daughter. I watched them drive off and then I went into the corner drugstore to think over the whole problem over a chocolate soda. The pieces didn't fit in place very well, I knew. If my mind had at first accused Jenkins of being a superstitious eccentric old man, my heart knew that Bryson and Stokes were intrinsically more backwoods and impressionable than Mr. Jenkins.

I realized now with the full weight of meaning that last night they had been silently terrified. They had left the factory floor as soon as they could. There had been no meticulous search of the building for a tramp or marauder who might have struck down the unidentified man. Neither had there been a careful examination of the immediate vicinity of the body to ascertain whether or not the victim might have somehow stumbled and inflicted the ghastly injuries upon himself.

This seemed much stranger to me today in Allen's Pharmacy over a soda than it had last night in the factory when I, myself, I confess, had been anxious to get out of that dim, musty, tomblike shed. Jenkins had worked with Garth. No one denied that. Jenkins had identified the dead man as Garth by a disfigured nail and finger on the man's hand. No one had attempted to deny that, not the selectmen, not Bryson, not Marshal Stokes, and yet there was a tombstone in the cemetery on the lonely road bearing Garth's name, and in the Town Hall files there was a death certificate for Bert Garth.

I had no house call till the afternoon so I made it my business to do some question-asking around the town, careful, casually, but about that place over in the glen, the place with many windows. I'd done a good deal of walking and talking by the time I got into my sedan several hours later. I found out this:

THE FACTORY originally had been set in that particular area because it was town acreage, town acreage because no one hereabouts wanted it, and the stories about it had grown and magnified themselves over the years. Once many decades ago it had been a camping spot for itinerant gypsy bands. In later years, there had been one family of these wandering nomads that had come back year after year on their way from anywhere to some strange location.

Glenwood was becoming more self-righteous then, and people who told of life through the medium of tea leaves and cards and who, it was whispered, had the sorcerer's gifts and knew the black arts, were no longer welcome. But the head of this family, a swaggering Spanish-Mexican named Freco or Frago—reports were a little vague as to just what his name had been—made it plain that he wished to buy the property.

But Glenwood, my town historians informed me, was growing then. Some outsiders with an eye for cheap property determined to grab the land. Freco, or Frago, disappeared one night and was found weeks later beaten to death on a road up in the mountains some miles away. There was not one of the gold pieces, his wife in broken English swore he'd been carrying to buy the land.

Perhaps many people were just as glad. The gypsies, harmless as they seemed, were just not wanted. But the dead man's wife and her three small almost-malformed children refused to vacate the site. The outsiders, by now, had themselves purchased the place. If little was known about them, at least they were more or less ordinary looking folk. They were rough diamonds but at least they were not gypsies. There were several in the village who whispered that the gypsy man's death might well have been planned and executed by them. If true, sympathies were on the side of the new owners.

But you cannot survey dynamite for a foundation, excavate, build around, over and through an ancient covered-wagon, two dappled ponies, a witchlike gypsy woman and her three little progeny, for they would not leave the acreage, and the gypsy woman's cursings and threatenings at the men who came to build were horrible to hear.

If no one else was sure, she claimed that these outsiders who came to put a factory up in this wilderness were her man's murderers. The town and its humble officialdom, still too small and impotent to do much outside of its two tiny paved streets, turned its collective face the other way. Turned its face the other way, that is, until a gypsy wagon was found making aimless time

down one of the roads on the other side of the village.

Aside from the two dappled ponies pulling the vehicle, there was no sign of life. The factory, though, commenced building the following week. The gypsy woman and her three children had vanished and unlike Freco, or Frago, they never came to light again.

Eventually the wagon itself was fired and the dappled ponies were sold into the secure, if unexciting, life of some pony-ride concession in a nearby Big Town.

These things I learned, not as one consistent piece but as scraps here and there, some overlapping, some conflicting. But the main impression that I had of that strange acreage beyond the reservoir whereon the place with many windows stood was one of unrest and trouble and things worse.

THE factory had originally been a printing plant. The owners did all kinds of printing jobs. No one ever knew quite how ends were met for there was little printing in the immediate locality, and why did big-city jobbers come so far away for their work? There were whispers around the town just before the war that perhaps all the printing was not quite on the up-and-up.

I was told this by several people, vaguely and with innuendo, and when I had pushed, "What sort of printing?" they had wagged their heads unsurely. The answer was left for my imagination but it wasn't hard to guess. When a state investigator had arrived in the town seeking a source of counterfeit bills that had flooded the area, a meticulous search had eventually been made of the old factory. An evil, musty smelling old place, dank and dreary for all its many windows but seemingly devoid of anything incriminating in its upstairs, its downstairs, its basement and its sub-basement.

And at the same time, perhaps strangely, its outside owners had fallen on the ultimate evil. They had died, and one by one had been laid to rest in a little cemetery across from their property. There had been no funerals. The burials had been very private, but the curious and passersby on the road had seen caskets being lowered into the ground, and Dr. Williams, my namesake, I thought to myself with a smile, had signed death certificates, and Dr. Williams, everyone agreed, was reputable even if rather queer.

The more I thought over what I had heard, the more I became convinced that Jenkins was neither crazy nor a nervous crank. It would, of course, decide one phase of the issue to go to the cemetery and exhume the graves of some of the men whose untimely ends so mysteriously coincided with one another, and so conveniently ended an investigation of their business activities.

I almost forgot, with my musings, the call I was to make at the Spinster Grimes, she who had preferred my first name to my namesake's and who had said I was so much better looking. I reassured her about her gout and then returned to my cottage.

There were snow flurries in the air as I garaged my auto and went inside. I built a fire and changed into my dressing gown. I had time to think; a whole evening and night, if necessary, and then tomorrow I would make my move. If the evidence warranted it, court permission to examine those graves should be forthcoming.

There was one grave in particular that I worried about, for its secret, I felt sure, might well be too unwholesome to share with the world.

I finally dozed off with a book in my lap and woke considerably later in the wee hours of the morning, cramped and cold, the fire having died out. I stretched myself and rose to go to my bedroom. My cottage was small, with a shallow cellar and a small attic; on the ground floor were the living and sleeping quarters. I had left the hall light on, and as I passed through on the way to my bedroom, I snapped the switch off.

Something made me look toward the window. Perhaps it was the sound of wetness tapping against the panes, for the snow flurries had turned in the night into sleet and rain. As it was, when I snapped the domelight off, I was in darkness and could see better the straight threads of wet beating against the window.

But beyond them there was something else! My impression was fleeting but unmistakable, for a moment after my light was out, what I had seen outside was gone, but it was a form standing there, indistinguishable except for figure outline and a white patch

where the face was, not nose-pressed against my window but further out in the night and now suddenly gone.

The thought came to me that if Jenkins' conclusions were correct, somewhere still at large was Bert Garth's murderer. I had no firearms in the house and I rationalized that it was too ugly a night to go snooping around outside. Perhaps it was some tramp.

I waited a moment more in the thousandth chance that it might be a call for help from a sick person but no one knocked at my door. Methodically I checked the locks and then made a round of the window catches. Only after I'd double-checked them did I go into my own room to get into bed, laying on the bedtable next to me a heavy walking cane that I used on long walks for protection against vicious dogs.

WHEN I woke in the morning the weather had cleared and—fickle March—the sun was shining brightly through my east window as though rain was some remote absurdity that could not happen. The first thing I remembered was the figure I had seen outside, and before I got my breakfast, I went out and looked around the house in the prescribed manner of detective-story heroes. I'm afraid my methods were both amateurish and unimaginative, or perhaps the rain had washed away any evidence of my nocturnal caller. I couldn't be sure there was any sign of footsteps other than my own, and they themselves were indistinct where they should be the most clearly marked—from the door to the garage—due to the deluge.

I set off to town immediately after my usual breakfast of eggs, toast and two cups of coffee. I went straight to the Town Hall, convinced that that was the only thing to do. Bryson was there.

I did the talking; he listened. I asked that the authorities examine the cemetery opposite the factory place with many windows. Bryson's broad unimaginative face showed no surprise at my request. There was only boredom, indifference, almost a studied amount of these. He said simply, "I'll talk to the marshal. He's the one to decide."

I said again, "Maybe Jenkins is right. How can we be sure that isn't Garth if no one who we know is living ever saw Garth buried. How do we know it wasn't Garth?"

Bryson said simply, "I'll talk to Marshal Stokes," and indicated plainly that that was all the time he had for me.

I must confess I was exasperated. It was plain that the country-bumpkin gendarmery of Glenwood was not interested in finding where justice lay. I resisted a strong impulse to go to the Jenkins' place, for I argued to myself I would be really going to see Phyllis and not entirely for my interest in seeing justice done.

As it happened, I was busy the rest of the day. A case of measles turned up down in the valley, and later one of the high-school boys broke his arm sliding down the hill near the railroad track.

That evening I made a point of going into town again. I bought a .22 caliber rifle at the hardware store, saying casually I thought I had seen a large rat around my garage. I bought a box of cartridges, too. I felt better sitting at home that night. I filled the five-capacity cartridge clip with the shells and practiced slipping it into its place in the gun, then pulling the bolt back loading the firing chamber. I am not a top hand with guns but I'd done some shooting as a boy and I knew that a .22 caliber slug will discourage a marauder just about as effectively as a bullet from a heavier firearm.

I stood the loaded gun in the corner of my bedroom and got to sleep a good deal earlier than the previous night.

THE next day, between Spinster Grimes, the measles case, the broken arm and a too-many-jelly-beans stomach upset, I was thoroughly busy, too busy to stop by the Town Hall and ask what they were doing about my request. Besides, Bryson had promised he'd let me know.

I wondered about the Jenkins family that late afternoon with my day's work done. The wondering turned to worry. It showed the jumpy state of my nerves when the hurried knock on my door at eleven p.m. almost catapulted me from my chair. I had started quickly and instinctively to my own room, for at least my walking stick, when I heard a voice, her voice, call through the door.

"Dr. Williams!"

I hurried to the portal then and threw it open. Phyllis stepped into the light. Her

hair was awry, her lovely face twisted with anxiety.

"Please, please come with me," she pleaded, her hands clutching at my arms feverishly. "It's father!"

I leaped for my hat and greatcoat, questioning her as I put them on.

"What do you mean?"

"He's gone. He's disappeared." The words tumbled out. "I'm so worried. I couldn't stay in that place any longer."

I realized now the strain the girl had been under. A less strong person would have broken before now.

"How long has he been gone?" I asked.

"Yesterday evening was the last time I saw him."

I thought of her alone for more than twenty-four hours with that strange cemetery to one side of her and the enigma of the old factory across the way.

She led the way to her car outside on the road. As we pulled away, I wondered suddenly what she expected me to do. I was neither posse nor police officer, and then almost in answer to my unasked question, she said forlornly, "I called Mr. Bryson. He's usually so nice to us, but I had the funniest feeling, Doctor. He didn't seem surprised when I told him about Dad disappearing. He didn't even seem particularly interested. It's scary. I called him this morning. He said he'd speak to Marshal Stokes and one or both of them would be up. They haven't come.

"Then a while ago I heard footsteps around the house, strange footsteps, not Father's. . . . I'm terribly frightened!"

She turned her eyes away from the road and looked at me. I wanted to put my arm around her and say, "Phyllis, I know. I'll do anything to help you. You know I will." Of course, it wasn't my place. I said simply, "We'll try to figure this out. It might not be as bad as you expect."

WE DROVE through the night along the same stretches of road that I had driven only a few days ago to that first macabre happening at the factory. The old place came into view and then our headlights picked up the Jenkins' driveway. Phyllis swerved the car in expertly and we pulled up against the house.

Hoping against hope she ran up the steps and onto the porch calling as she threw open the front door, "Father! Father!" But there'd been no lights.

"He hasn't come back," she said unnecessarily and turned to me, her fingers clenched white.

I closed the front door behind me and sat down in the first chair I found.

"Let's try to think this out," I said. "He's not in town or someone would have seen him, or at least there'd be no reason for him to be there."

Jenkins had not been insane, or so I believed from my superficial associations with him.

"You think . . . " I questioned, seeing the answer in her face, ". . . you think he went across the way to the place?"

"Yes," she breathed. "He wasn't satisfied. He kept talking about how Stokes and Bryson didn't really look around."

"I'll go over there," I offered quietly.

"No! No! Don't!" She put out a restraining hand.

I shrugged my shoulders and stood up.

"It's better knowing, isn't it?"

I felt my remark was a little brutal, but how else could the situation be resolved? I had no desire to cross the road and enter that ghostly bewindowed structure, but if her father were lying there on the floor injured or dead, we must find out. She'd have to face it eventually. Better now while I was here with her.

I'd had the presence of mind to bring my medical bag. The best weapon I could find was a knife I carried in my surgical equipment. Phyllis got me a flashlight.

"Stay here," I said. "Keep the door locked."

I left her, stepped outside, and started towards the place with many windows.

The night was very dark, much darker than my first nocturnal visit here a few days ago, as though with its very darkness, it would spread a black robe of anonimity over horror and innocence alike. I shone the torch briefly, just enough to show up the outlines of the path leading out to the road. I wanted my eyes to get used to the darkness. I felt the tar of the highway under me and then I had crossed the crown of the road, and in front of me darkly outlined like

a many-eyed monster was the rambling factory.

I went inside through the same door and stood in the same musty, dusty abandoned room. I shone my light on the floor where I had seen the dead man that other night. As I bent closer, my knees felt uncomfortably weak and I jumped at the mournful sound of the wind sighing in a crack of one of the windows. Jenkins' words flooded back into my mind that there had been no careful examination.

Yes, there was a bloodstain directly where I recalled his head would have lain. I flashed my light around in a circle, and Jenkins' theories took on added weight. Certainly there was nothing, in the immediate hereabouts upon which a man could have dashed his brains out.

I stood straight up and began the repugnant but wholly necessary task of exploring that evil building. The first and second floors were virtually barren. Here and there a long table carried a few rusty pieces of printing equipment. What there was was cobwebby and ill-ordered. I felt sure from the tracks I found I made on the dusty floor that no one outside of ourselves those nights ago had had much to do with the first floors of the building I explored.

In the north corner, though, I discovered the cage car. It was as old as sin itself, an ancient-vintage contraption of an elevator with cables you pull yourself and counterweights which kept you from crashing into whatever black hole lay beyond and below my eyeview. The car, with the capacity for three at most served the top and ground floors. Through the sides of the latticed wire-work, I could work the cables.

I EXPERIMENTALLY pulled on it and the little cage car first creaked upward. Then as I heaved on the other rope, it descended through a hole in the ground floor to some unseen basement. I searched diligently for several minutes on that first floor for the sign of some stairs. If there had been any, they were now concealed by having been sealed or boarded up beyond my discovery.

I returned to the cage car. I must admit I debated with myself for some time whether or not it would be foolhardy to descend into the black abyss beneath where I stood. I tested the cable car with my weight carefully, perhaps hoping the contraption would not work and thus the decision would be beyond me. Of all the things in this dilapidated unused building, the cage car, however ancient, seemed in good working order. I got resolutely into the lift and began to lower myself cautiously.

As the floor moved up to my head, I felt like someone going down into the bowels of the earth wherein could lie only those fantasy forms unfit for the surface and man's eyes. My surgeon's knife was a formidable weapon up close, but nevertheless, I wished I had had a gun. Almost immediately the cage dropped to a position where, with my flashlight, I could see I was in a sort of basement. At the floor level I stepped out of the car, my knife ready in one hand and my flashlight flicking over the rough cement floor and concrete walls of the chamber in which I found myself.

It was large and had a greater collection of printing equipment than I had noticed upstairs. I had the feeling, it was strange, inexplicable and hard to fortify with facts, that this place had not been bereft of all human activities for as long a time as upstairs. I had taken not more than four, five or six steps from the elevator shaft when I saw something that touched the back of my neck with icy fingers of premonition. Perhaps because it dovetailed with a theory that I was beginning to hold myself. Perhaps—well, who knows.

For what is so frightening about a shovel? Just a shovel, with its wooden shaft and handle and its square metal spade. Nevertheless, my light played unwaveringly on it. I came closer and I saw what confirmed my worst beliefs. I bent over quickly and touched the line of still-moist earth on the edge of the shovel blade.

Then with quick resolution, I took it under my arm and raced back to the cable car. I pulled myself up to the ground floor and hurried out into the night. Not back to the Jenkins' home but over to the small cemetery. I ran as fast as I could in the darkness and with the shovel under my arm as though a life depended upon my getting there quickly.

I leaped irreverently between and over the graves until I stood in front of the one

marked "Bertram Garth, 1896-1941." I began to dig. I cared not for a court order or my lack of it. I only knew I had to keep digging as fast as I could, for if I were to slow down, I might lose the conviction and resolution that drove me on.

I NOTICED, I think, before I turned five shovelfuls that the earth was soft and not packed hard as it should be after lying here untouched under God's sky and elements for five years. I dug and the sweat began to come out on my face even in the late March night air. Looking back, I am not sure what I expected to find or what I did not expect to find. I think I knew instinctively that there would be no Garth, for as I dug deeper and deeper my spade hit only earth. There was no sudden thump as the blade hit a casket.

There was, though, finally a soft resistant something under my spade. I pushed the earth away and reached down with my hands. I felt cloth. I pulled on the coat, for such it was, and an arm and then shoulders and finally a head came reluctantly out of the newly turned grave. It was Mr. Jenkins.

My eyes were blurred with the effort of my exertions and my hands trembled too much to make any sort of examination beyond ascertaining the fact that he had been dead for some hours. I stood up to collect my reeling senses and regain my strength. I took my flashlight and beamed it around that cursed cemetery. There were only a few stones. I remembered the villagers had told me it was a private place, only for those outsiders, the factory people. Here was Eichler and Smith and Popinjay. I remembered their names vaguely. With Garth they had been the impresarios of this factory venture.

My light flicked forth and picked out another tombstone. Dr. Joshua Williams, it read. I crossed to it, nearer. I stood looking down, noting casually that the earth here was packed normally and as it should be. This grave, seemingly, had not gaped up its dead nor claimed to itself another. I read the name over, Dr. Joshua Williams, and I spoke the words almost aloud. For here lay the only man who could vouch for the natural or unnatural deaths of the others and he himself was dead! I may have smiled a little and then I looked back at the excavation where Jenkins lay.

I wedged flashlight and knife into my pocket, took Jenkins under the armpits and hoisted him. I knew what I had to do. I started not towards his home but back over to the eerie old factory. I thought to myself as I neared the door of the place that I heard soft steps behind me. I turned my head quickly, but in the darkness there was nothing to see.

I went inside and stretched Jenkins out on a long table near the far wall. I laid the flashlight at his head. There was no skull injury like on the first victim who, I was sure now, had been Garth. Then I saw the rent in the clothing and opened the man's coat and vest. There was an ugly heavy caliber bullet wound directly over the heart region. Jenkins had died instantly. I went through his clothes carefully. There was nothing of interest.

I WAS standing there bending over the body undecided as to what to do next, my back to the door, when I heard the soft scuffing sound behind me. I wheeled around, reaching instinctively for the scalpel I'd laid down with the flashlight on the table.

"Don't!" cried a voice, and Phyllis stood threateningly not three strides away with a heavy crowbar in her upraised hand, near enough to use it on me.

Her face was contorted with loathing, with shock and with hate, and yet with all those alien emotions, she was still, I think, the loveliest woman I had ever seen. Lovely and formidable.

"You killed Dad," she accused between clenched teeth, her face white, but the sturdy arm that held the menacing crowbar was steady.

"Phyllis!" I cried out.

"Father told me that Dr. Williams was at the bottom of this the last time I saw him. I didn't know what he meant."

I saw the girl was very close to cracking. It was only her fury that kept the hysterical tears back.

"He said to me, 'Things are not what they seem to be. There are some that are alive that should be dead and the dead, they are alive.' "

"But your father knew what the other Dr. Williams looked like," I pleaded. This was the one contingency I had not planned on.

"I don't know about that," she almost sobbed. "You look different. You seem different. Those things can be done, but that was Garth killed here the other night. And now you . . . you've killed Father!"

I pleaded with her. I talked fast. The girl was on the edge of hysteria, perhaps temporary insanity due to the strain of the last few days or the shock of tonight. Try as I did, I was making no impression.

"Phyllis," I said stepping towards her. "Put that thing down! We've got to talk. It's my life, maybe yours, maybe others if we don't."

I stepped closer and I saw in her fear-clouded eyes what she meant to do. They flicked from me quickly to the body of her father lying behind me and then back. I knew a split second before she struck with the bar that she meant to hit me. I stepped sideways, dodged the blow and caught her arms. She struggled fiercely and it was all I could do finally to wrest the iron from her hand. Then suddenly she slumped in my arms.

I saw she had not fainted but the strength at last had gone out of her along with the hate and fury. I supported her tenderly and talked rapidly as I did. I told her we had a chance to clear this thing up but that we must act fast, that we would never rest if this canker were left unattended.

Gradually the strength came back into her lovely body. When I suggested she go back to her house and wait for me behind double-locked doors, she demurred. We would see the thing through together, she said. After all, she had more at stake than I.

For the second time that night I got into the cage car, this time with Phyllis, and we descended into the blackness below. The first level had yielded up its most startling surprise in the shovel that had sent me helter-skelter across to the cemetery. Our search netted us nothing more of interest, but it was evident that the lift went to still greater depths.

Despite my own continued misgivings for Phyllis' safety, she said with a determined stiffening of her chin that we must see the thing through together. The cable car dropped again, lower, lower into the sub-basement. This was hewn out of the very rock and soil itself. The floor was damp, uneven here and there. Along the far wall was lined a row of heavy chests, double-locked.

I took Phyllis' crowbar and smashed at the catches. The chests opened under my feverish fingers. There were plates within. Metal plates. Printing odds-and-ends, meaningless to me.

Phyllis, who'd stepped away from my side for a moment with her own small flashlight, called to me. As I turned, she pointed out a double piling of cans and kegs in one corner. We looked and found oils and tins of kerosene, printing inks, and other solutions.

THE cavernous basement stretched out beyond us into the darkness, and we walked towards its outermost limits. Suddenly I felt Phyllis' clutching hand at my arm. Her light had picked something out. Mine flicked forward, too. There ahead of us, unmistakably were four small mounds of earth, one long and three much shorter. At the head of each was a crude wooden cross set in the earth.

Phyllis looked at me and her fingers were a vise on my forearm. I thought immediately of the story of the gypsy and her three children. How they had lived here and then suddenly disappeared just before the factory started building. I knew Phyllis would know the legend as well or better than I. I said nothing. I simply put a comforting arm around the girl's shoulders and turned her away from the macabre sight.

It was then as we walked back that I noticed the cage car was no longer at our level. I stopped dead and Phyllis stopped, too, the question on her lips dying as she looked in the direction of my eyes. We stood there for several minutes, neither speaking, then we heard the thing that I feared the most in the world, the sound of the cable car from above beginning to descend again.

Instinctively I pushed Phyllis behind me, first taking from her grasp the heavy crowbar she'd brought. As I did, I hoped my hands were as steady as hers, but the girl's face was very white in the upward reflected glow from the electric torch.

I trained the light on the empty place where the cage car must descend. We waited, her hand in mine, returning what I meant to be a reassuring squeeze with a firm clasp of her own. This girl had more than her beauty; she was made of fine stuff. Perhaps it didn't matter so much about me. I had gone into this with my eyes open. I was no innocent put-upon bystander, but that the girl must now come face to face with her ultimate destiny in a form, the exact horror of which I could not guess, other than it would be horrible. That seemed a sinful travesty of justice and right.

The cable car, I knew, served the four levels of the building. Two above-ground, the cellar, and the sub-cellar in which we stood. The faint creaking sound of the elevator seemed to come eternally, a creaking that grew infinitesimally louder but which seemed to build itself on suspense as the minutes ticked by. Perhaps the seconds seemed minutes, measured against the rapid pounding of my heart.

It did seem forever though that we stood there waiting, until finally the bottom of the elevator, shoes, trousers, and then a figure came into view, settled to our level and stopped. The man, for so the figure proved to be, was no more than a black shadow against the dimness of the cage itself. He wore a black slouch hat and an old-fashioned long cape.

AS HE stepped toward us out of the lift with a small suitcase-like object in his left hand, he seemed like some black-garbed sinister traveler from another century, perhaps from another world. The .45 caliber revolver in his right hand pointed straight at us was strictly twentieth century, though. He walked toward us, his figure slightly bent over, not from age but from occupational conditioning. He set the suitcase down before him and stepped back. There was a torch in his hand. The revolver mouth stared unwaveringly at our hearts.

"Good evening," the man said, in almost pleasant tones! "I am Dr. Williams."

I made my hand big in my coat pocket. I spoke in what I hoped was a gruff, forbidding voice.

"I have a gun too. I'll put mine away if you put yours away."

It was a poor gamble. He threw his head back and laughed, not a pretty laugh, and even laughing, his eyes were on us, his eyes that fascinated me. They seemed to have no iris, no pupil, but appeared to be of a neutral sand color. I knew something now that I had guessed before. This man was at least partially insane and wholly dangerous. The laughter ceased abruptly.

"I have been observing you for some time, you and Miss Jenkins."

I felt her figure stiffen in mine.

"You have no weapons other than that piece of iron you're holding and a silly knife in your pocket."

"What do you intend to do?" I asked. "There will be others here before long." It was a bluff but I hoped it didn't sound like one.

The other Dr. Williams spat contemptuously. "There will be no others. The townspeople and our neighbors want no part of this place. The only others who would are dead. Your father, Miss Jenkins, and Bert Garth."

"You killed them," I accused.

He made no pretense of denying it but tut-tutted as though we were small children.

"Don't become impatient. Your turn will come and very soon, I promise you. Now you!" his voice cracked out like a whip as he gestured at Phyllis. "Come forward slowly. Slowly! Pick up the suitcase. That's right. Now both of you turn around and march towards the far wall."

What else could we do? We followed his directions. He seemed to be counting, measuring something behind us as his light flicked over the ground.

"Halt!" he called suddenly.

He bade Phyllis put the suitcase down and then shouted at me. The man was getting more excited, I noticed, exhibiting definite mental symptoms.

"Bend over to your right a little. A little more. There! Now dig!" he hissed at me. "With your hands. Dig."

It was a wearisome, loathsome task under this madman's direction. I was afraid of what my scratching fingers would bring to light, that they would suddenly encounter the coldness and dampness of entombed flesh. Instead, a fingernail broke on metal, and soon I had scraped the earth off several

plates, lead they were. I lifted one, scrutinized it. It was—of course!

"Never mind that! Put them in the suitcase."

There were six in all.

"Go on digging," his voice rang out.

I DID, watching from out of my crouch for the slightest opening that would allow me to spring at him, but he was clever. He never came too near and he never stopped watching us with those strange opaque eyes, terrible for their unemotional masklikeness in a face that was otherwise Satanic and a moving kaleidoscope of blasphemous expressions.

Soon I dug up two long packets with paper stuff crinkling inside. He cackled delightedly.

"You see, I'm not only a great doctor but a great artist as well."

Under his direction we packed the stacks of bills, counterfeit, I am sure they were, into the suitcase, closed it and stepped back. He backed away from us slowly, slowly, and I prayed he'd trip or that something would attract his attention and divert those unwavering eyes that fixed us as steadfastly as the mouth of his automatic. Without looking, he slid the suitcase beneath him into the elevator when he reached the cage shaft.

"Now," he said, "I have a peculiarly exciting treat in store for you. You shall die in splendid fashion." He laughed again.

It was the laugh and the eyes that told a medical man that here was a mind, however brilliant, that had leapt beyond the confines of normalcy and was even now reaching out into the dark boundaries and bogs of mental aberration.

He crossed to the wall where previously I had noted the cans. He bent down and kicked several over, spilling their contents onto the ground. One of the largest he brought back and placed on the ground before the elevator shaft. Never once, not once, mind you, did his unblinking eyes really leave us. He unscrewed the top and dumped the contents in a pool. The pool widened. The smell was of kerosense, its outer reaches trickled from wall to wall.

I knew now the death that he had planned for us and I realized worse, that Phyllis knew also. He would drop a match into these inflammables and soon the sub-basement would be a blazing cell. We would never reach the cage shaft, but if we did, there would only be the mockery of empty space, and our breaths and sounds in that underground inferno would surely be limited to a very few.

"Why are you doing this?" I asked. "You are a scientist and an artist. Why should you be a murderer?" I knew I was only sparring for a few more moments of life.

He took me up with an answer.

"Things should be clean," he replied. "No loose ends. No disgruntled satellites. That was why I did for Garth."

"Garth was with you originally on the counterfeit scheme," I said. "Garth and the rest of the men who came in here, but when things got tight and investigations started in the county, you decided it would be better to stop operations." Some of these facts I knew. Others I was guessing at desperately. They were lucky guesses. "You and Garth decided to kill your other partners in actuality, and you two also sought the immunity of the grave from the authorities. Then you both vanished, but you cached some packs of money. . . ." I indicated the suitcase, ". . . and the even more valuable plates for printing it.

"You came back after things quieted down. Then it was, of course, like all persons of your ilk, you wondered why Garth should be in on the final take, so you killed him."

THE black-caped figure bowed mockingly, and he supplied the rest. "And Jenkins, your fool father, made the mistake of being honest," he smiled at Phyllis. "Jenkins knew too much and guessed the rest. And you . . ." he turned to me ". . . you were under constant observation."

I remembered the dim figure outside my window that stormy night.

"But we've had enough of talk, eh?" he backed toward the cage.

Once he was in the elevator, I knew we were doomed. Somehow, I must keep him talking. Each spoken word was a reprieve for us.

"There's something else though. There's the matter of the people who had first claim to this land."

For the first time, his eyes narrowed.

"The gypsy family," I continued. "The man who was bludgeoned and robbed of the gold with which he lawfully meant to purchase this acreage. The gypsy woman and her three children. . . ." I shrugged my shoulders.

For the first time Joshua Williams' eyes left us and traveled up the black hole of the sub-cellar behind us, his flashlight trained in that direction. I was fifteen feet away but I gathered my muscles to spring, and then before I could act he screamed. An angry maddened sound and he was glaring at us again. My chance was gone, and what was he saying, gibbering at us?

"You put those up! You put them up over their graves! And you heaped up the earth again! Now take them down." He motioned menacingly with his gun and took a step towards us.

I had won a point and perhaps lost one, for now he wasn't very far away from shooting us, I saw that.

"Go on," he said between gritted teeth, his eyes narrowed. "Go back there and pull out those crosses you planted. Level those mounds."

I said nothing but turned around and pulled Phyllis with me. We stumbled along, hearing his steps behind us. We came to the graves, the four mounds there in the earthen basement floor, the long one and the three short ones. One by one I took the crosses, broke them as he instructed and threw the rude wood away. I pushed the earthen mounds level.

His mutterings continued. Some of it was incoherent; some I could make out. Phrases. Fragments. That the gypsy man came back and heaped up the earth, put crosses here. That was the story. Garth believed it, and weren't all the villagers afraid of this place? Didn't everyone say, even Marshal Stokes and Deputy Bryson, that gypsy ghosts still haunted this dreary structure?

He was not for old wives' tales. Crosses were the work of Garth in the beginning, then perhaps Jenkins and then us. His accusing voice rose higher, and I knew the time had come to act. It was a small chance or no chance, but that was no consideration.

I had a clump of hard earth in my fist and I threw it with all my strength at Joshua Williams. I aimed for his face, but my throw was poor, or perhaps not. It caught his left hand and knocked the flashlight from it. The sound of the torch smashing to the ground was as nothing followed by the roar of the .45 caliber gun in his right hand.

I PULLED Phyllis to the ground roughly and heard the smack of the slug hit the ground near us. I knew then that we had lost. We were at the far end of the cellar, an armed maniac between us and the cable car. I could hear him even now searching on the ground for his torch. If he failed to find that, or if it did not work, there was ours which he'd ordered us to drop further down near where the pool of kerosene saturated the earth in front of the shaft.

The roar of his pistol came again above the cursings. I knew we could not move, for any sound from us would be a target for him.

Then came his Ah of satisfaction. He'd found the torch.

There was a flicker of light from the right. It was over among the graves. The light started to stab in our direction. I murmured a prayer and tried to cover Phyllis with my body.

Then inexplicably the torch went out again, and Joshua Williams screamed. It was a long drawn-out sound and it rose to a thin, terrible crescendo that reverberated from those dank earth and stone walls.

I pulled Phyllis to her feet then, and in the blackness we stumbled forward, spurred on by those maniac sounds. More than once we nearly stumbled or bumped against the sides of the cellar. Then I felt the sloshing wetness of the kerosene-soaked earth, and in a moment I had my bearings and was pushing Phyllis into the cable car.

All this time, and I know not how long the time was, the scream had continued like a whistle. It seemed incredible that a man's lungs could hold that much air or that it could be expended in such a paroxysm of fearsome sound. I pulled desperately on the up cable, and the motion and creaking of the old lift came gratefully. As we started upward, I reached into my pocket and drew forth the small lighter there. I thumbed it to life, and then making Phyllis bury her

face under my shoulder, I threw it out, out into the sub-cellar.

There was a burst of flame, and in that orange-yellow explosion of sudden angry light, I saw down at the other end . . . I saw . . .

Phyllis and I barely beat the rising flames up the elevator shaft. By the time we had pulled Mr. Jenkins' body out of the old factory, the place with many windows was alive and dancing with yellow serpents of fire.

We crossed the road, staggered a few steps further. I laid Mr. Jenkins down tenderly and fell to Phyllis' side. We watched the night become a red twilight of inferno. By and by, the volunteer Fire Department came, but by then the shedlike structure was nearly consumed and the last flaming sides of its windowed walls were falling thunderously into the maw of the evil stone basements below.

GLENWOOD town officials cared little about details beyond perfunctory and superficial explanations. It was accepted that Mr. Jenkins had died in the building. Phyllis and I thought that story was the best. The place with many windows, for so long an evil eyesore and a place of haunting menace to the countryside impregnated with its legend and tradition of evilness, was no more. I am going to ask Phyllis to sell her father's house and come and live with me as my wife. I have only one matter first to settle with my own conscience before I propose to the girl I love. You see, Joshua Williams was my older brother, and this was the culmination of many other episodes where I had to right his wrong-doings as nearly as I could.

This time I tracked him across half a continent and had tried to right his final wrongness in the most inexorable way Fate knows. I know as a medical man that my brother was brilliant as a doctor and as a person and as a malevolent criminal. I also know that at the end he was not entirely sane and I wonder whether to tell Phyllis. Will this thing be a blight between us? Oh, I know what she'll say.

She'll say, "Edward, it's you I love."

Of course, I'll ask Phyllis to be my wife, for that is the most important thing in the world to me. I believe myself to be entirely sane. I have even surreptitiously visited two well-known psychiatrists for their expert opinions. I have received a clean bill of health, and yet . . . and yet I have this one reservation. As a man of science, I must have it. It concerns my memory of that fateful, awful night. I can clearly relive those dreadful moments and that last nightmarish escape from a doom that seemed as certain as it would have been awful.

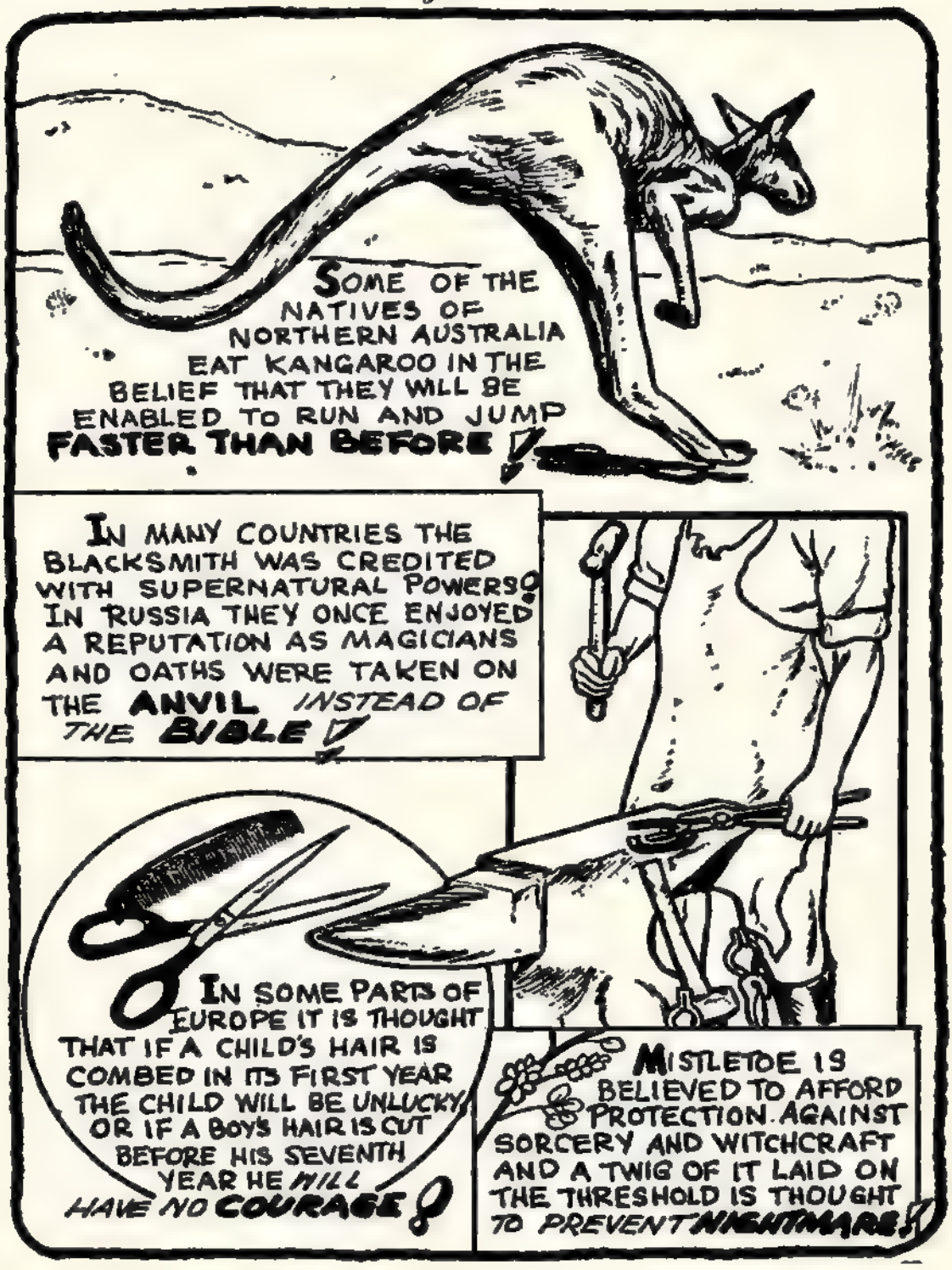
I can still feel Phyllis' head buried against my chest and I can remember the way I flicked forth my cigarette lighter into the sub-cellar as we ascended from it. The burst of flame and the sight that I saw and can recall so vividly beyond the flames at the other end of the basement beyond the graves.

Joshua Williams running in meaningless circles like a man pursued by the Devil, and yet after him perhaps were things worse. You see I saw them, four figures, one a woman, the witchlike figure of a gypsy with a black wooden staff in her hand, and the others, three nearly nude misshapen little creatures. They were clawing and pulling at Joshua Williams in a primitive way that was obscene as it was unbelievable. All the time there was that cacophony of terrible sound.

I saw him go down to be leaped upon by the four as the flames mercifully threw up a red curtain and the lift ascended beyond the ceiling level. All this I know Phyllis would laugh at, and yet I saw it. . . .

Superstitions and Taboos

By Will



Masked Ball

HALFWAY down the block Holloway came to a halt, a grin of self-derision on his face. "Chump!" he muttered. "If I had a little more sense I'd be a first-class halfwit."

He had been in New Orleans three days, crammed his time with sightseeing, and as a climax to his trip had dined at Franchetti's, which was the indirect reason for his present predicament.

If you know New Orleans at all you know you do not merely eat at Franchetti's, you dine there, which is not at all the same thing. He had started with green turtle soup with clear dry sherry, followed it with oysters Rockefeller washed down with Irroy '93; then filet of pompano with Barr Tramier and breast of guinea hen under glass with Nuits St. George's, and for dessert a bowl of frozen strawberries in half-melted vanilla ice cream with brandy and cointreau poured over them. Dinner had consumed two hours, and by the time he drained his demi-tasse of pungent chicory coffee he was more than merely comfortably fuddled and inclined to let events take their course without assistance from him.

It was the eve of Ash Wednesday, and the tide of carnival which had been rising steadily since Twelfth Night had reached full flood. He had considered hiring a domino and mask and going down Canal Street to watch the Parade of Comus, but at the *costumier's* in Conti Street he had allowed himself to be over-persuaded.

"A domino, a simple *masque, M'sieu'?*" the *propriétaire* had asked in shocked, grieved tones. "For *you?* But no. You cannot mean it. It would be unthinkable. Attend me, wait one little minute while I select the *costume juste* for you!"

He was a tiny man, the costumer, all full of bows and gestures, as bustling and officious as a bluebottle-fly. His hair was thin and gray, his little pointed beard and wisp of waxed mustache might have been molded out of burnished pewter, and his small, deep-set eyes were very bright behind the lenses of black-rimmed pince-nez from which trailed a broad black ribbon.

While Holloway waited he rummaged through a stack of cardboard boxes almost as large as steamer trunks, humming a small tune to himself. Presently he came back smiling broadly, and with something of the air of a magician about to produce a rabbit from a high hat, dragged out his find and held it up for admiration. *"Voilà!"* he exclaimed triumphantly. "Is it not *incroyable?* Is it not made to order for *M'sieu'*—to set his special *type* off as a frame must complement a picture? But yes, of course!"

The costume was by no stretch of imagination to be called "fancy." It consisted of a fringed buckskin shirt worked with wampum and stained baby porcupine quills at neck and cuffs, a pair of buckskin breeches, long buckskin leggings, deeply fringed, and a pair of moccasins on which the beaded design of the jacket had been repeated. To top it off there was a coonskin cap with the hair left on and a wisp of ringed tail swinging from the back. "It is the dress of a *coureur de bois,* not just a modern imitation, but a true, historical antique," the little man explained. "One worn by the so formidable scouts who kept the forest trails open for the government when Louisiana was New France and New Orleans the capital of a great new empire. Yes, certainly."

He stepped back, dragged a full-length mirror forward, and held the buckskin garments out to Holloway. "Put them on, *M'sieu',*" he urged. "Regard yourself in them and say if I have not the flair for costuming a patron in accordance with his character and *physique.*"

The costume fitted Holloway as if it had

BY SEABURY QUINN

Is not femme fatale *also the vampire, ruin of men's souls and bodies?*

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

been tailored to his measure, and as he viewed himself in the long mirror he had to admit that it "complemented" him, as the proprietor had declared.

Holloway was long and rangy, six feet in his stockings, loosely jointed, agile, but inclined to be deliberate in his movements. A tennis player since his tenth year, a veteran of three years in the Southwest Pacific, he had not an ounce of surplus flesh on his big frame, though he tipped the scales at an even hundred and eighty. As he surveyed himself in the glass it seemed as if a century and more had been rolled back and he saw one of Governor Kerlerec's Kentucky mercenaries looking back at him. "H'm," he conceded, "it's not half bad, but if I'm to be tricked out as a *coureur de bois* I ought to have some armament—"

"Perfectly, *M'sieu'*," the proprietor was delighted. "Me, I have just what is needed. Oh, yes!" The weapon he produced from an old brass-bound chest was a museum piece, a flintlock rifle with a long octagonal barrel, walnut stock with brass butt plate, and a wooden ramrod. Its rear sight was a brass notch, its forward one a small button of silver. With it went two wooden powder flasks, one for the rifle's charge, the other for the finer priming powder, and a buckskin bag of bullets.

Holloway slung the rawhide thongs of the ammunition carriers over his shoulders and weighed the gun critically. It was a sweetly balanced piece, some fifty inches long from butt plate to muzzle, and as he laid his cheek against the hollow, carved for it in the dark walnut stock, he realized here was a precision weapon, slower in action and with less striking power than the M-1 he had been used to in the Pacific, but accurate to a hair's width within its rather short range. "Does this go with the suit?" he asked incredulously. "It must be worth—"

"No matter, *M'sieu'*," the costumer broke in. "Me, I do not deal in trash. All my costumes are authentic, all my equipment genuine, I assure you."

DARKNESS had begun to fall, and purple shadows gathered in the narrow street as he emerged from the costumer's with the long rifle cradled in the bend of his left elbow and a half-mask hiding the upper portion of his face and giving him a comfortable feeling of anonymity. The effects of his excellent dinner were still with him, and somehow he made several wrong turnings and found himself in Basin Street instead of Canal, where already crowds were gathering to watch the gorgeous spectacle of the parade.

Behind him, looking like a giant barrel laid on its side, rose the roof of the Municipal Auditorium, a little to his left were the tall whitewashed walls of the old cemetery, and beyond the iron grille of its gate rose the ornate three-storied tomb of the "Widow Paris," once famous as a voodoo priestess. Behind the tomb, as tightly packed as soldiers marching in close formation, the lime-washed sepulchers of long-dead citizens of New Orleans stood rank on solid rank. "Now, let's see," he murmured. "Rampart Street should be that way; if I walk down it I'll come to Canal, and—"

The sharp, metallic click of a gate latch broke through his unilateral conversation and he looked up just in time to see a girl emerge from the old graveyard. Even at the little distance of the street's width he could not distinguish much of her, for a dark cloak covered her from neck to heels, enveloping her completely as an Arab woman's burnoose, but her walk was graceful as a dancer's movements, a cadenced, sensuous swinging of the hips and breasts that was innate and unconscious as breathing, but none the less provocative, and as she turned her head so unconcernedly that he was sure she was aware of his presence he caught a fleeting glimpse of her face, perfect oval with a small, sharp chin, a small straight nose and hair that curled in a halo of tiny jet-black ringlets round her brow and ears. Then she was gone, her dark cloak blending with the violet shadows till it seemed a part of them.

Holloway had an odd, eerie feeling, a sort of sudden stab of poignant yearning. He had been restless with the restlessness none but the soldier trying desperately to reaccustomed himself to civilian life can understand since he had left the separation center. New York, which he had dreamed of with a longing half-painful, half-ecstatic,

was somehow disappointing. Life had gone on without him for three years; his old friends had married or formed other interests, and one and all were intent on business. "How are you? Glad to see you! Good bye, now!" had been the universal formula, and he was terribly lonesome. His old job waited for him, but somehow it seemed to have lost its attraction. "Make up your mind, man; are you coming back, or aren't you?" Wilbur Flacker had asked. "We've got a slue of work in the office—five new accounts came in yesterday, and we can use a good copywriter. We want to do the right thing by the returned soldier, of course, but if you don't want the job . . ."

On sudden inspiration he had taken a train for New Orleans. He didn't need to give Flacker a final answer till Monday, in the meantime he might find surcease from restlessness in the gayety of Mardi Gras. So there he was, due to go back tomorrow on the morning train, and still as lonesome as a cat in a strange alley, still mentally at sea.

THAT girl, what had there been about her to attract him so suddenly and powerfully? It couldn't have been love, or even the quick passion of the predatory male. He had no idea whether she were thin or chubby, his glimpse of her face had been only momentary, yet—there it was, as if far down in his subconscious a deep layer of desire had stirred and trembled.

He hesitated for a moment, then set out after her, his long stride eating up the little distance separating them. An immense, inarticulate desire seemed to surge through him, for the moment nothing in the world seemed so important as to speak to this only half-glimpsed girl who had glanced at him so briefly across her cloaked shoulder.

Overtaking her should have been easy, but somehow gathering darkness, unfamiliar streets and perhaps his own eagerness combined to thwart him, so here he was, as much at fault as a hound when the fox takes to a brook, gazing down an empty, shadow-haunted street with no sign of his quarry in sight. "Chump!" he repeated to himself. "Of all the chuckle-headed—"

Plop! Something struck the sidewalk beside him with a soft impact and he looked down to see a white camellia at his feet. "Now, where the devil did that come from—" he began when a light laugh sounded just above him.

The house before which he stood was typical of the older buildings in the *Vieux Carré*—the old French Quarter. Sitting back some eight or ten feet from the sidewalk, it had double porches or "galleries" before it, supported by intricately wrought iron grille work. The lower gallery, at street level, was without railing, but the upper was guarded by a balustrade of quaintly designed iron scroll work. *"Mon fleuron, s'il vous plait, M'sieu'!"* came the command in a soft, high voice—"My flower, if you please!" A girl leaned laughing from the balcony, her slim, bare arm extended toward him and her slender fingers reaching for the flower at his feet.

The pale light of the newly risen moon hung round her like a nimbus, and he recognized her instantly: the lady of the cemetery.

"Oh, hello," he greeted inanely. "I'd been wondering—"

"Ma fleur!" she interrupted imperiously. "Toss it up to me—instantly, if you please!"

He threw the white bloom up, but it fell just short of her questing fingers, and she laughed delightedly as he caught it before it could strike the pavement again. *"Encore!"* she ordered. "Try again, great clumsy one."

Once more he tossed the blossom up, and once again, but each time it eluded her grasp. *"C'est sans profit,"* she told him finally. "You lack the skill or I the length of arm, it seems. Bring her up to me, if you please."

This was more than he had hoped for. "You mean I may come up?"

"But naturally. What is there to fear? Although I have the teeth I shall perhaps not bite you."

The street door of the house was unlatched and Holloway pushed it back, groped through a narrow, almost lightless hall, and up a flight of narrow, winding stairs. She waited for him on the balcony, and close up she was even lovelier than he had realized. Her face was pale, colorless and fine-textured as a magnolia petal, but her lips were brilliant red. Her black hair, worn

in a long bob with curls about the brow and neck, was positively gleaming, and he knew instinctively that the ringlets had not been put in with a hot iron. Beneath the haughty arch of slender brows her eyes were dark and soft, he could not say if they were black or pansy-purple, but they were beaming with good humor, and the smile upon her crimson lips pushed a small dimple in her cheek.

"Er—ah—" he began ineptly, for suddenly he felt tongue-tied, but she saved the situation.

"Ma fleur, M'sieu'!" she ordered with mock hauteur, as she held out her hand, then, with a sudden, rippling laugh, *"mais non,"* she turned her back to him. "But no. Into your hand it fell; it is that you must set it back into its proper place." She bent her head and pointed to the curl in which she wished the flower set. "Come, *M'sieu'*, I wait upon you."

Her hair was almost incredibly soft and fine as it brushed his fingers, and his hand trembled as he put the flower in place and took quick stock of her. She made him think of ladies he had seen pictured in old French prints. Her gown was China silk, so heavy that it hung as straight as if it had been weighted at the hem, yet so sheer that it showed the lovely shadow of her figure. It was white, high-waisted, and cut with a low neck line and tiny shoulder-puff sleeves that showed her lovely arms off to perfection. Beneath her bosom was a sash of pale-blue silk that tied at the back underneath her shoulders in a coquettish knot and trailed its fringed ends almost to her dress-hem. Her slim, small feet were stockingless and shod with sandals fastened with cross-straps of purple ribbon laced across the instep and high up the ankle. Save for the small gold rings that shone in her ears she wore no ornaments of any kind.

"Good Lord!" he breathed as he set the white flower in place among the gleaming black curls.

"Comment?" She looked across her shoulder, arching her brows at him. "What is it that you say?"

"You're lovely!"

"M'sieu!" The laugh that rippled from her lips was like the sound of water poured from a tall silver vase. "But it is you who say the pretty things! Poor little Clothilde Deschamps, she is ugly like a frog and scrawny like the plucked pullet, yet you say that she is lovely, her. How can you say such utter flattery? No matter, I delight in it. We shall sit here *tête-à-tête*, and you shall tell me monstrous complimentary lies, and I shall believe them all. Come."

She took his hand and led him to a sofa standing by the wall, dropped down on it and drew him down beside her. "Commence," she ordered arrogantly. "Lie to me *grand comme le bras*—as long as your arm. Tell me I am lovely, me—" She moved a little closer and her soft hair brushed his cheek, its perfume fresh and sweet. Her eyes were wide and soft, and her mouth tender. "You meant it, *Vraiment?*"

WINE could not have raced his blood faster than it was racing with the intoxication of her nearness and the music of her voice. "Lovely!" he whispered, and his heart beat so that he could hardly force the word out.

Her eyelids lowered slowly, as those of one who falls into a gentle sleep might do, and her lips parted like the petals of a flower. *"Embrasse moi!"* she whispered, and put her hands up to his cheeks, drawing his mouth down to hers. Her lips were smooth and soft as the flower petals in her hair, her arms were warm and tender round his neck, the sweetness of her perfumed body pressed against his was like an enervating drug. A humming sounded in his ears; everything went dark around him, and a spell of dreamy lassitude crept over him. He was fainting, swooning, dying . . . and he did not care. Nothing mattered. Nothing. . . .

Abruptly she pushed him from her and rose to her feet. "We must make haste," she told him, almost matter-of-factly. "Await me here while I prepare my *toilette*. I shall be but one little moment, perhaps two or three, no longer."

"Your *toilette?*" he echoed. "Why—"

"Ah bah," she laughed as one might laugh at the inept question of a dull child. "You would not have me put the shame on you by going to the *bal masque* in such clothes as these?" There was a patter of

small feet upon the gallery floor, and she was gone.

Holloway rose from the couch and walked to the porch rail. Things were happening so fast he couldn't keep pace with them. He had found her, kissed her, now, it seemed, she was taking him to a masked ball. He looked down on the darkened street. Somehow, it seemed different. The shadows seemed to cluster more thickly, the street lamps burned less brightly, and in the changed light the houses lining the curbs seemed less ancient. From somewhere, far away, there came the muted throbbing of a drum, not the rhythmic rapaplan of a marching cadence, but a dull, persistent thrumming, urgent and impelling; there was insistence and abandon in the hollow booming of the taut parchment. He felt vaguely uncomfortable, recalling stories of the voodoo rites the blacks practiced in the days when Jackson Park was Congo Square.

But the chill vanished and he smiled as from the house there came the sound of singing, a tune that was at once both sad and gay, as if the singer smiled through her tears. He could not distinguish the words, for they were in Creole, but the voice was charming, with the throaty, velvety quality that is the heritage of Latin races.

"Voilà!" Once more the pit-pat of her feet sounded and she stood framed in the oblong of the doorway, slim and glowing. Her tightly curling hair had been combed high and tied with a fillet of white silk at the front of which an aigret plume was fastened by a small pearl brooch. In her ears were pearls almost as large as filberts, and round her neck there lay another strand of pearls that made him catch his breath not once but twice—first, because the pearls were almost beyond price, and second, because the neck they rested on was almost the exact color of the pearls. Her gown of heavy white brocaded silk was cut low at the front and back, with little puff-sleeves at the shoulders, tight at the bosom, but flaring sharply from a high-set waist. Across her shoulders draped a scarf of silver tissue which hung down either side like the stole of a cleric. Her narrow feet were shod with satin slippers of pale shell-pink, flat-soled and heelless as a ballerina's shoes, and laced across the instep and about the ankles with narrow ribbons. He felt his heart melt as he looked at her: The dim, misty black hair, the dark eyes like deep pools of shadow in the pale oval of her face, the smiling scarlet mouth—not a flaw in her from small head to tiny feet, her figure fine-drawn as a thoroughbred's, slim, delicate, with dainty wrists and ankles and a neck like the stem of a flower. White and frail as a narcissus, and very beautiful.

"Am I not truly *élegante?*" she demanded as she took her skirts in her hands and dropped him a deep curtsey. I shall not put the shame upon you, brave *coureur de bois?* One moment, while I set my visor on, then let us go." She placed a black half-mask across her face, tying its silk strings behind her head, and put her hand upon his arm, so lightly he could scarcely feel her touch.

He glanced down at her appreciatively. The topmost curl of her coiffeur barely reached his shoulder. "What are you made up as?" he asked. "The Empress Josephine?"

Her eyes came up to his, wide with astonishment, and her lips parted in an indulgent smile for an obviously silly question. "I the Empress of the French? But no, *bon ami,* I am nothing but poor little Clothilde Deschamps who goes out only as herself."

Sudden laughter bubbled up through her smile. "La, la!" she exclaimed. *"C'est drôle, hein?"*

"What's so funny?"

"Me, I have let you hold me in your arms, we have kissed each other; we are going to the *bal masque* together, and I do not even know your name, me! *Obé,* but it is *scandaleux,* it is infamous, *n'est-ce-pas?"* Her laughter tinkled like a silver bell swung in the wind.

"I'm Horace Holloway," he answered as his chuckle matched her higher, merry laugh. "It is a little unconventional, but—"

"I like your name," she broke in, half gaily, half seriously. "It suits you very well. Horace was a poet, and I think that you are that; the very look of you says so, even if you write no verse your heart is filled with poesy. And hollow-way? A road that holds no traffic, no passengers, *n'est-ce-pas? Bon.*

I accept your poetry, my friend, and as for emptiness, cannot you find room in your heart for Clothilde?" As unaffectedly as a child she turned her face up to his and waited for his kiss, eyes closed, lips a little parted.

He kissed her slowly, and she put both arms about his neck as she stood on tiptoe and pressed against him. How sweet, he thought, sweeter than the heart of a rose, sweeter than the mists of happiness—far too sweet! For deep within him a small bell seemed ringing, sounding a faint, warning tocsin of alarm. Despite the allure of her pale smooth skin, her bright vermilion lips and jet-black hair, despite her sweetness and her unaffected, trustful ardor, there was something vaguely frightening about her, some subtle, secret suggestion of the *femme fatale*, the vampire, the ruin of men's souls and bodies.

She linked her arm in his and laced her fingers in his hands as they resumed their walk. "When did you—when did it happen to you?" she asked suddenly.

He studied the question a long moment. She had a quaint way of expressing herself, with her queer jumble of slow, stilted English and quick, ebullient French. "How do you mean?" he countered.

She seemed to ponder in her turn, then, softly, as if the question were embarrassing, "When did you become—like me—us?"

"Oh!" Understanding flickered through the fog of his perplexity. Even if her words were obscure, the apparent self-consciousness of her hesitant speech gave him his cue. "It must have happened when I first saw you by the old cemetery, my dear."

"*Mon Dieu!*" Her laugh began as a soft, throaty chuckle and rose to a high silvery tinkle. "But it is you who say the sweet droll things, my Horace! Next you will be telling me that I shot Cupid's dart at you and pierced your heart and laid you low!"

"I think you did," he answered, and in the shadow just outside the disc of light cast by a street lamp they stopped and kissed each other again.

SOMEHOW, the streets seemed different, not changed, exactly, but not quite as he remembered them. The curbside lamp posts seemed farther apart and their lanterns shed less light. The houses, too, seemed smaller, newer, better kept; and here and there he could perceive dimly a sort of shadow hovering over them, as if the faint mirage of larger and more modern buildings poised above them.

HIS sense of direction was blunted by these odd mutations, but as nearly as he could determine they had come to Orleans Street when his companion guided him around the corner and down the block. Midway between what he thought Bourbon and Royal Streets there stood a plain low building of whitewashed brick that made him think of a warehouse, but through the narrow windows piercing its walls brilliant lights shone.

They crossed the street and mounted the low steps that led to the wide doorway. Inside the place was a kaleidoscope of gayety. Chandeliers that dripped with scintillating crystal prisms shed the soft, bright glow of candlelight on everything, the walls of paneled precious woods were hung with oil paintings, some depicting landscapes, some pastoral scenes, more showing classic gods and goddesses—or gentlemen and ladies dressed like them—engaged in rather naughty goings-on, while the bright faces of a hundred mirrors echoed and re-echoed the frolicsome scene. Somehow it made him think of the bright prints and paintings of Gros, Gérard, David and Ingres which showed the life of Paris during the Diretorate and the First Empire so delightfully.

The dancers circling round the floor of quarter-sawed waxed oak wore almost every sort of costume imaginable. Here a gentleman in the white coat and powdered hair of a French officer of Bourbon days swung past with a frail, lovely lady in hoopskirts in his arms, a little farther off a man in the tight pantaloons and long coat of the Directoire period danced with a girl who wore the neo-classic costume of Napoleon's court, while here and there was to be seen a suit of severe black broadcloth, but with the frilled shirt and stock collar of the early nineteenth century.

"Shall we dance?" asked his companion when he had found a place for his rifle,

and placed her left hand in his right while she laid the other on his collar so lightly that it might have been a butterfly taking momentary rest there.

The music was three-quarter time, but the dance not quite familiar. The step was quicker than the waltz he knew, and the couples whirled and turned and pirouetted so constantly that he was almost giddy by the time they had completed a circuit of the great ballroom.

"You have money, yes?" she asked as they paused out of breath before the door of a long, brightly-lighted room from which the clatter of roulette wheels and the click of dice sounded.

"A little," he replied, shoved his way through a throng of people grouped about a roulette table and tendered a five dollar bill to the impassive croupier.

"*Combien?*—how much?" the man asked, and Holloway saw with surprise that he too wore a black half-mask across his face.

"*Tout,*" he replied, "I'll shoot the works," and received a handful of gilded *plaques* about the size of checkers. Half of these he handed to Clothilde, who placed them on a red square marked 23 as the croupier announced in a flat, toneless voice, "*Le jeu est fait, M'sieurs et 'dames. Rien ne va plus*—the play has commenced, no more bets are to be placed"—and spun the wheel.

The people crowding round the table became so still the clatter of the little ball in the wheel was like the rattle of hailstones on a tin roof. Motionless, with parted lips, raised eyebrows and craned necks, they watched the spinning wheel and the little ivory sphere that danced in it.

"*Vingt-trois, rouge, M'sieurs, Mesdames,*" the croupier's bored voice proclaimed as the wheel lost momentum and the ivory pellet spinning in it came to rest. A woman laughed, a high, thin titter of hysteria, and staggered drunkenly from the room. A man rose from his place, looked round him with a sickly smile, and lurched toward the doorway, and half a dozen eager players crowded forward for their places.

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu,* but I have won!" Clothilde cried ecstatically and clapped her hands like a delighted child. "I am rich, me!" Her bet had been two dollars, and the croupier pushed a pile of coin and bills toward her with one hand while with a little wood rake held in the other he gathered in the wagers of the losers.

"Come, let us celebrate, *adoré,*" she cooed, and drew him toward a line of curtained alcoves at the far side of the room. "Champagne it shall be for us, and dozens of those small sweet cakes that I do adore almost as much as I adore you, *mon amoureux. Hola,*" she called to a velvet-coated, black-masked waiter who went hurrying past, "a bottle of champagne, and many, many *petits-fours, mon petit garçon noir,*" and the waiter, a gigantic Negro, grinned appreciation of her pleasantry in calling him "her small black boy."

The champagne frothed and bubbled in their goblets, but to Holloway it seemed to lack substance, as if it were but little more than chilled air he sipped, and the little sugared cakes, delectable to look at, were flat, tasteless and unsubstantial as crumbs of Chinese rice cookies. Clothilde seemed to enjoy them hugely, however, and as she sipped champagne and nibbled small pink-and-white-iced cakes the color rose in her pale cheeks until they glowed a lovely pearly rose, and a new sparkle came into her eyes. "Now, I think we dance some more, *hein?*" she suggested as she rose and stretched a hand to him. "And after that we play some more roulette until he has no more money left. Then we shall drink some more champagne—maybe *aux pêchers*—with peaches in him—and eat some more *petits-fours,* no?"

"Yes!" he assented as he followed her to the ballroom. It was crazy as a hasheesh-eater's dream, a scene straight out of the *Arabian Nights* with overtones of the Left Bank. He knew it couldn't possibly be happening; things like this just didn't happen, and women like Clothilde did not exist—but that did not matter. For the first time since his return from the army he was happy, deliriously, feverishly happy. On with the dance—let there be madder music; stronger wine!

The candles in the crystal chandeliers cast golden light on everything. Clo-

thilde's small, slim waist lay sweetly in the circle of his arm. Her laughing eyes looked into his, her lips were parted just a little to show the tips of small, white teeth. They whirled about the long room, reached the door of the gaming *salon*, and paused for breath, laughing with sheer happiness as only children and lovers know how to do. "Shall we assail the battlements of Fortune once more?" she asked as he released her from his embrace. "We may win more this time, and—oh! *Pardonnez-moi, M'sieu'! Mille pardons!*" As she wheeled she had collided with a young man carrying a silver tray on which were two goblets of champagne, and the spilled wine splashed across the rippling ruffles of his dress shirt.

There was a moment's silence while she waited contritely for his word of forgiveness, and Holloway could see the young man's florid face behind his mask go slowly gray, as if the blood drained from it. Deliberately he drew a lace-edged handkerchief from his cuff, blotted his soiled ruffles with it, then turning on Clothilde whispered in a cold voice: *"Cochonnette noire!*—little black pig!"

She cried out as if she had been struck, and the blood swept up her throat and cheeks and brow in a quick, outraged blush.

Holloway hit from the hip and felt the man's jaw collapse under the impact. His body curved back under the shock and he sprawled like an upset tailor's dummy, inert and loose-limbed, on the waxed floor.

"But you are marvelous!" Clothilde told him as they entered the game room. "You strike like the ball of the cannon, my Horace." She gave a small ecstatic giggle. "He looked so stupid lying there all sprawled out like a spider, that *sale chameau!*"

Holloway felt his knuckles which still smarted from the force of their collision with the man's jaw. "I wish I hadn't knocked him out with the first swing," he answered. "I'd like to have another go with him."

"Oh, but you will, *bon ami*. Assuredly."

"Think he'll come back for more?"

"He will demand the satisfaction, certainly. He cannot do less in honor."

"I'll be ready to meet him whenever—"

"Be sure to choose the firearms, *chèri*. Do not let them trick you into fighting with the *colchermarde* or *épée*. He is a famous duelist, that one—I know him, me!—and would surely run you through at the first pass—"

"For heaven's sake!" he burst in. "D'ye mean that I'm expected to fight a duel with that little stinker? I'll be hanged if I do. If he wants more of the same I've got it right on ice for him, but a duel—good Lord! People just don't do that sort of thing today."

"Ah, Horace, you would not put shame on me? You would not have them say I came to the *bal masque* with a *poltron* for my protector? They will surely brand you as a coward if you refuse to meet him—*mon Dieu*, I think I see them coming now!"

"Be easy, sweetheart," he soothed, patting the tense fingers which had clasped on his arm. "If I'd get you in wrong by refusing to fight this guy I'll meet him any time and place he wants to name, and shoot the pants off him."

WALKING elbow to elbow, two young men were coming toward them. One wore the gold-laced white coat of a French officer of the days of Bourbon ascendancy, the other was in sober black, but scarcely less ornate than his military companion. His shirt of finely tucked linen cambric was trimmed with row on row of lace in which there gleamed studs of green jade set with black pearls, a diamond buckle held the wide black ribbon of his stock, the buttons of his low-cut waistcoat were bright silver.

Both men came to a halt as if obeying a command, struck their heels together and with right hands on their hearts and left behind them jack-knifed forward in a formal bow. *"M'sieu'!"*

Holloway was not to be outdone. Drawing himself up as if to attention he inclined frigidly in what was little more than the suspicion of a bow. "At your services, *Messieurs.*"

The young soldier, who seemed to recognize Holloway as a member of his craft, spoke first. "We have the honor to represent M'sieu' Médard de la Tour, and on his behalf to demand satisfaction for the blow that you have given."

Holloway racked his memory for the proper response. Vaguely, he knew he should have a second. But how to go about securing one? At last: "I have no one to act as second for me, *Messieurs,*" he answered, "but if you will have the kindness to procure me one I shall be happy to put my interests in his hands."

"Très bien." It was the young officer again. "Me, I have nothing else to do; I shall be honored to act as your second, *M'sieu'*—" he paused with raised brows.

"Holloway," the other responded. "Horace Holloway, late of the United States Army. That sounded impressive, especially when he neglected to add he had been Corporal Holloway.

All three exchanged curt, formal bows again, and the civilian left to inform Monsieur de la Tour how things progressed, while the young soldier remained. "I am the Chevalier de Broglie," he announced, "and as a gentleman of France—" he bowed low to Clothilde— "I offer my profound apologies for the affront my *ci-divant* principal offered *Mademoiselle.*"

Clothilde dropped him a deep curtsey, and the young officer turned to Holloway. "As for the blow you gave, *M'sieu',*" he grinned boyishly, "it was a lovely thing to see, and I can say only *'à merveille*—well done!' I trust that you will be successful on the field of honor as in the ballroom a moment since. Now to business: As the challenged party you have the right to name the time and place of meeting and the weapons to be used. What are your preferences?"

Something about "pistols and coffee for two at daybreak" popped into Holloway's memory. "Why not tomorrow morning at sunrise in St. Anthony's Square?" he hazarded. "I've heard that is a favorite place for—"

"M'sieu', I fear that you forget," de Broglie interrupted coldly. "You know as well as I that this affair must be concluded at once. Your jest is not in the best of taste."

Holloway was amazed at his sudden coolness, but let it pass without comment. "Very well, one time's as good as another. Make it long rifles at forty paces, behind St. Louis Cathedral."

His second bowed and hastened off, and Clothilde looked at him reproachfully. "O, Horace, *adoré,* how could you?" she asked almost tearfully.

"How could I what, dear?"

"Make such a reference to the morning. You know as well as I that with the breaking of the dawn we must—*mon Dieu,* here comes de Broglie now. Be careful, heart of my heart. He is a good shot that one, and may injure you. Be sure to fire first." Impulsively she held out both hands, and he bent above them, kissing each in turn.

GIGANTIC oak trees, bearded with long garlands of gray Spanish moss, stood solemn, black and silent at the edges of the park, their almost-bare limbs seemed uplifted as if to evoke malignant spirits from the winter sky. From the distance came the moaning of violins as the orchestra in the dance hall played on, but in the square an ominous quiet reigned. Like drifting shadows members of the company moved on their grim errands of setting the stage for the duel. A gentleman in a long cloak and broad black hat who looked like a conspirator in a melodrama paced off the course, two more set stakes in the short grass where the combatants were to stand, the seconds, conferring in whispers, watched while two others loaded Holloway's long rifle and another like it for his antagonist.

"Messieurs!" The umpire stepped forward with upraised hand. He was a tall, commanding figure in a tight blue uniform piped with gold and scarlet braid and with gold epaulets on his shoulders. The upper portion of his face was obscured by his black mask and the lower half by a wide, curling mustache and a short black beard. He spoke French with the cautious precision of a slight accent. Holloway had the impression he was a Spaniard, but could distinguish little from his unfamiliar uniform. *"Messieurs,* this is a duel between Monsieur Médard de la Tour of Nouvelle Orléans and Monsieur Horace Holloway of the United States Army to avenge a blow given and received. The principals will stand at forty paces from each other, armed with rifles. I shall say, 'Fire—one, two, three, four, five!' and the combatants will discharge their pieces between the words

'Fire,' and 'Five.' One shot only will be exchanged. Are you ready, gentlemen?"

Young Chevalier de Broglie handed Holloway his rifle with a smile. *"Bon chance, mon ami,"* he whispered. "Aim for the eyeholes in his mask, and just a little low. These rifles have a tendency to elevate their bullets."

WITH the rifle "ready" Holloway awaited the command. In the moonlight-softened darkness de la Tour loomed like a spot of darker shadow, uncertainly defined against the duskiness of the great oak boles. He had buttoned his coat tightly and tied a black silk handkerchief about his throat, so he was in unrelieved black from head to foot, with no highlight to sight on.

"Clever little devil," Holloway muttered as he weighed the rifle in his hand, "but I don't think it'll get him much." He hadn't earned his expert rifleman's badge for nothing, and potting skillfully camouflaged Jap snipers had been an everyday chore for him in the jungle. The buttons on his adversary's coat were silver and shone with a dull luster in the moonlight. The second one on the left side should be almost above his heart. He'd put a slug through it as sure as God made little apples. Killing in war had been impersonal. You shot and were shot at. If the other fellow's bullet had your name on it you were done for, if you had his number on your slug he was. This was different. That grinning little monkey yonder had insulted Clothilde . . . only one shot would be exchanged, eh? All right, if that was how they wanted it . . . he'd killed better men with one shot. . . .

The umpire's voice broke through his reverie: *"Attendez, Messieurs.* Fire—one, two—" Bright orange flashes stabbed the darkness and the reports of the rifles were so close that one seemed but the prolongation of the other. Holloway saw a slim arc of silver hurtle through the gloom like a small meteor where his bullet clipped de la Tour's coat button, but de la Tour did not go down. He stood, rifle in hand, and looked at him as if he saw some fearful apparition. Then, slipping down his left arm from the shoulder, he felt the warm ooze of blood, and knew he had been hit, though if his wound were light or serious he did not know.

A hum of talk, the sort of frightened whispering that precedes a panic, ran from man to man among the witnesses to the duel.

They looked at the blood seeping through his buckskin shirt with bright, fear-burnished eyes, and one or two raised trembling, frightened hands to point to the stain. *"Sacredieu,"* he heard de Broglie exclaim, "he is one of *them!"*

Slowly, fearfully, they shrank back to the shadows of the oaks as men who see a frightful specter might give way before it, yet fear to turn and flee, lest it set on them from behind.

"What the devil—" He took a step toward the terror-stricken group, and they shrank from him as if he were plague personified.

There was a rustle in the oleander bushes growing at the park's border, and Clothilde came toward him, breathing with quick, jerking gasps, the eyes behind her mask a glaze of sickened fear. "Horace," she spoke thickly through fear-stiffened lips, "is it truly thou?"

"Of course, dear. And I'm not badly hit. That fellow couldn't shoot fish in a barrel—" He took a step toward her, but she shrank back, hands upraised as if to ward some terror from her.

"Don't—don't come too near!" she begged, and he could see that she was using all her self-control to keep from turning and flying.

"What *is* it?" he demanded. Everyone—his late antagonist, his second, all the men, and now Clothilde, shrank from him as if he were a putrescent corpse. "Tell me, Clothilde—"

"Did not you know—truly?" she asked tremblingly.

"Of course, I don't—"

"You know not who we are?" She seemed to grasp her courage with both hands, holding it by main strength.

"No—"

"We are the dead. Once every year, upon the eve of *mercredi des cendres*—Ash Wednesday—it is permitted us to leave the tomb and come back to the scenes we knew in life in seeming-flesh. Upon

this single night in all the year it is permitted that we laugh and love and be as gay as in the days when we were living. Those who loved in life may then renew their sweet communion; those who fought and hated may take up their quarrels if they desire. The city is the same as it was in the days of old, for time moves not for the dead."

HE STARED at her stupidly, made a move toward her, and she gave way a faltering step. "Forgive me, *chèri,* I would not hurt you, but as the living fear the dead, so we dead fear and shrink from the living. You are terrible to us. So have a little patience with poor frightened Clothilde whose love is greater than her fear —but, *hélas,* not much greater.

"How could I know? When I saw you outside the cemetery in your costume of the ancient days I thought that you were one of us, and though I did not know who you might be, my heart yearned toward you. Then when you passed my house I knew that you had followed me, and I was glad, so I dropped my flower down to you and you came up to me—"

"But—"

"The time is short, *adoré;* I must hasten. Do not interrupt. You will remember that I asked you when it happened as we walked down Royal Street? I meant when were you killed. Me, I was stricken with the plague the year that General Jackson held the city from the British, but you seemed of an earlier day—like one of Governor Kerlerec's Kentucky legionnaires who held the forest pathways for New France. And when you told me that it happened when we met I thought you spoke the lover's jest, and I was so delighted with the pretty compliment that I did not press you for an answer.

"When you accepted de la Tour's challenge I followed to meet you as you came from the *champ d'honneur,* for I well knew that though a sword or bullet could give you great pain, those who are already dead cannot be killed again, so though you might be sorely wounded, there would still be a few minutes in which we could share this new-found love of ours. But when I saw your blood begin to flow I knew that you were one of *them*—the dreadful living whom we fear so much!"

"But you just said you love me," he broke in. "If that's so, surely—"

"Alas, my heart, within the grave there is no loving. 'Twixt you and me there is a gulf no love can bridge. Not even if you died could you come to me, for—I know not why it is, I know only that it is so—our company is made up of those who died many years ago. Not only life and death, but time as well is set between us like a wall!"

The night was tiring rapidly, and in the eastern sky a faint gray streak edged with the palest rose began to show. She came a little nearer, fearfully, but with a loving courage that outfaced her fear, and it seemed to him that suddenly there blew so soft a perfume in the fading dark that he could almost see it take shape. She kept looking at him, her eyes were wide, her lips parted as she breathed faster. Suddenly she snatched the satin mask from her face and flung herself into his arms. "O, Horace, *m'ami, je t'aime, je t'aime—je t'adore!*"

She was sobbing with heart-shattering sobs, fighting hard for breath, but her eyes were bright and steady with mingled adoration and renunciation. *"Un dernier embrassement!*—one last kiss!" she besought in a tearful whisper, and raised her face to his.

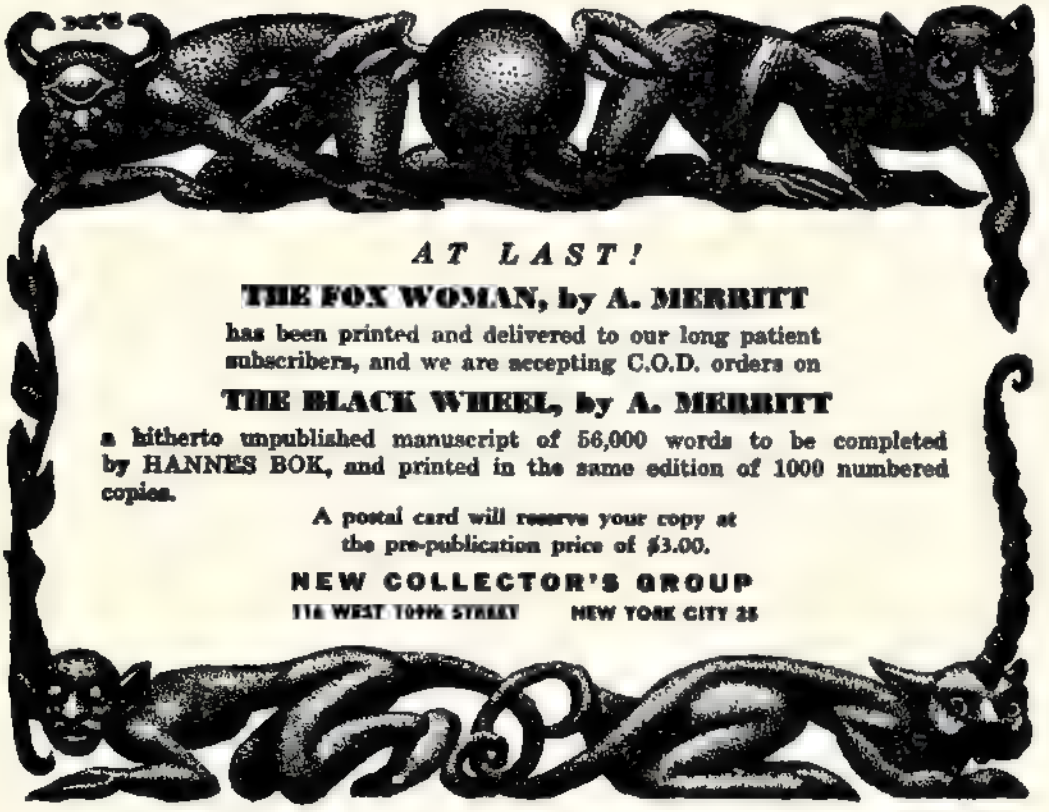
He held her to him a long, trembling moment. He could feel her heart beat with quick, light strokes like the ticking of a watch. She gave a little, tortured moan and became limp and yielding in his arms, then twined her hands about his neck, pulling his lips hard against hers and drawing her body against his. *"Adieu,"* she whispered brokenly. *"Adieu, coeur de mon coeur, pour le temps et pour l'éternité!"*

The world about them seemed to have stopped in its course for a long moment by some formula of potent magic, then from a belfry somewhere in the distance a gong sounded; the still air held its echoes till it seemed to quiver, and daylight came so quickly that it seemed a gust of wind had blown the dark away.

It was morning. And suddenly his arms were empty.

THE train wheels clicked with an insistent monody as compelling as the kettle-drums in Ravel's *Bolero*. Holloway sat in the club car with his glass of bourbon untasted before him as he gazed out at the flat, marshy landscape and the bare trees with their dreary streamers of gray Spanish moss— "like funeral crapes," he thought. Save for the stiffness in his left shoulder where his slight wound pained no longer, he might have been convinced that he had dreamed it all—Clothilde, the masked ball, the duel in the moonlight behind the Cathedral. He was going back to New York, back to work and every-day prosaic sanity. He'd meet his friends again, make new contacts, take life up where he left off when he put on the uniform. He'd find an anodyne for broken dreams in work . . . there would be other women. . . . He laughed suddenly, so harshly that the fat man across the aisle put down his copy of the *Times* and stared at him.

OTHER women—vibrant, living, flesh-and-blood creatures! He knew as he knew that he lived and breathed that, flesh or phantom, lovely dream or sweet reality, Clothilde Deschamps who died in 1814 and lay buried in St. Louis Cemetery was the one and only love of his life, that always while he lived his heart would cleave to her memory as constantly as the tides swing to the moon.



Mistress Sary

Incredible things can happen to the rhythm of an ancient jingle!

BY WILLIAM TENN

THIS evening, as I was about to enter my home, I saw two little girls bouncing a ball solemnly on the pavement to the rhythm of a very old little girls' chant. My lips must have gone gray as the sudden pressure of my set jaws numbed all feeling, blood pounded in my right temple; and I knew, that whatever might happen, I couldn't take another step until they had finished.

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

"One, two, three alary—
I spy Mistress Sary
Sitting on a bumble-ary,
Just like a little fairy!"

As the girl finished the last smug note, I came to life. I unlocked the door of my house and locked it behind me hurriedly. I switched on the lights in the foyer, the kitchen, the library. And then, for long forgotten minutes, I paced the floor until my breathing slowed and the horrible memory cowered back into the crevice of the years.

That verse! I don't hate children—no matter what my friends say, I don't hate children—but why do they have to sing that stupid, little song? Whenever I'm around. . . . As if the unspeakably vicious creatures know what it does to me. . . .

Sarietta Hawn came to live with Mrs. Clayton when her father died in the West Indies. Her mother had been Mrs. Clayton's only sister, and her father, a British colonial administrator, had no known relatives. It was only natural that the child should be sent across the Caribbean to join my landlady's establishment in Nanville. It was natural, too, that she should be enrolled in the Nanville Grade School where I taught arithmetic and science to the accompaniment of Miss Drury's English, history and geography.

"That Hawn child is impossible, unbelievable!" Miss Drury stormed into my classroom at the morning recess. "She's a freak, an impudent, ugly little freak!"

I waited for the echoes to die down in the empty classroom and considered Miss Drury's dowdy, Victorian figure with amusement. Her heavily corseted bosom heaved and the thick skirts and petticoats slapped against her ankles as she walked feverishly in front of my desk. I leaned back and braced my arms against my head.

"Now you better be careful. I've been very busy for the past two weeks with a new term and all, and I haven't had a chance to take a good look at Sarietta. Mrs. Clayton doesn't have any children of her own, though, and since the girl arrived on Thursday the woman has been falling all over her with affection. She won't stand for punishing Sarietta like—well, like you did Joey Richards last week. Neither will the school board for that matter."

Miss Drury tossed her head angrily. "When you've been teaching as long as I have, young man, you'll learn that sparing the rod just does not work with stubborn brats like Joey Richards. He'll grow up to be the same kind of no-account drunk as his father if I don't give him a taste of birch whenever he gets uppity."

"All right. Just remember that several members of the school board are beginning to watch you very closely. Now what's this about Sarietta Hawn being a freak? She's an albino, as I recall; lack of pigmentation is due to a chance factor of heredity, not at all freakish, and is experienced by thousands of people who lead normal happy lives."

"Heredity!" A contemptuous sniff. "More of that new nonsense. She's a freak, I tell you, as nasty a little devil as Satan ever made. When I asked her to tell the class about her home in the West Indies, she stood up and squeaked, 'That is a book closed to fools and simpletons.' Well! If the recess bell hadn't rung at that moment, I tell you I'd have laced into her right then and there."

She glanced down at her watch pendant. "Recess almost over. You'd better have the bell system checked, Mr. Flynn: I think it rang a minute too early this morning. And don't allow that Hawn child to give you any sass."

"None of the children ever do." I grinned as the door slammed behind her.

A moment later there was laughter and chatter as the room filled with eight-year-olds.

I BEGAN my lesson on long division with a covert glance at the last row. Sarietta Hawn sat stiffly there, her hands neatly clasped on the desk. Against the mahogany veneer of the classroom furniture, her long, ashen pigtails and absolutely white skin seemed to acquire a yellowish tinge. Her eyes were slightly yellow, too, great colorless irises under semi-transparent lids that never blinked while I looked at her.

She *was* an ugly child. Her mouth was far too generous for beauty; her ears stood

out almost at right angles to her head; and the long tip of her nose had an odd curve down and in to her upper lip. She wore a snow-white frock of severe cut that added illogical years to her thin body.

When I finished the arithmetic lesson, I walked up to the lonely little figure in the rear. "Wouldn't you like to sit a little closer to my desk?" I asked in as gentle a voice as I could. "You'd find it easier to see the blackboard."

She rose and dropped a swift curtsey. "I thank you very much, sir, but the sunlight at the front of the classroom hurts my eyes. There is always more comfort for me in darkness and in shade." The barest, awkward flash of a grateful smile.

I nodded, feeling uncomfortable at her formal, correct sentences.

During the science lesson, I felt her eyes upon me wherever I moved. I found myself fumbling at the equipment under that unwinking scrutiny, and the children, sensing the cause, began to whisper and crane their necks to the back of the room.

A case of mounted butterflies slid out of my hands. I stopped to pick it up. Suddenly a great gasp rippled over the room, coming simultaneously from thirty little throats.

"Look! She's doing it again!" I straightened.

Sarietta Hawn hadn't moved from her strange, stiff position. But her hair was a rich chestnut now; her eyes were blue; her cheeks and lips bore a delicate rose tint.

My fingers dug into the unyielding surface of my desk. Impossible! Yet could light and shade play such fantastic tricks? But—impossible!

Even as I gaped, unconscious of my pedagogical dignity, the child seemed to blush and a shadow over her straighten. I went back to cocoons and *Lepidoptera* with a quavering voice.

A moment later, I noticed that her face and hair were of purest white once more. I wasn't interested in explanations, however; neither was the class. The lesson was ruined.

"She did exactly the same thing in my class," Miss Drury exclaimed at lunch. "Exactly the same thing! Only it seemed to me that she was a dark brunette, with velvet black hair and snapping black eyes. It was just after she'd called me a fool—the nerve of that snip!—and I was reaching for the birch rod, when she seemed to go all dark and swarthy. I'd have made her change to red though, I can tell you, if that bell hadn't rung a minute too early."

"Maybe," I said. "But with that sort of delicate coloring any change in lighting would play wild tricks with your vision. I'm not so sure now that I saw it after all. Sarietta Hawn is no chameleon."

THE old teacher tightened her lips until they were a pale, pink line cutting across her wrinkled face. She shook her head and leaned across the crumb-bespattered table. "No chameleon. A witch. I know! And the bible commands us to destroy witches, to burn them out of life."

My laugh echoed uncomfortably around the dirty school basement which was our lunchroom. "You can't believe that! An eight-year-old girl—"

"All the more reason to catch her before she grows up and does real harm. I tell you, Mr. Flynn, I know! One of my ancestors burned thirty witches in New England during the trials. My family has a special sense for the creatures. There can be no peace between us!"

The other children shared an awed agreement with Miss Drury. They began calling the albino child "Mistress Sary." Sarietta, on the other hand, seemed to relish the nickname. When Joey Richards tore into a group of children who were following her down the street and shouting the song, she stopped him.

"Leave them alone, Joseph," she warned him in her curious adult phraseology. "They are quite correct: I *am* just like a little fairy."

And Joey turned his freckled, puzzled face and unclenched his fists and walked slowly back to her side. He worshiped her. Possibly because the two of them were outcasts in that juvenile community, possibly because they were both orphans—his eternally soused father was slightly worse than no parent at all—they were always together. I'd find him squatting at her feet in the humid twilight when I came out on the boarding house porch for my nightcap of

fresh air. She would pause in mid-sentence, one tiny forefinger still poised sharply. Both of them would sit in absolute silence until I left the porch.

Joey liked me a little. Thus I was one of the few privileged to hear of Mistress Sary's earlier life. I turned one evening when I was out for a stroll to see Joey trotting behind me. He had just left the porch.

"Gee," he sighed. "Stogolo sure taught Mistress Sary a lot. I wish that guy was around to take care of Old Dreary. He'd teach her all right, all right."

"Stogolo?"

"Sure. He was the witch-doctor who put the devil-birth curse on Sary's mother before Sary was born 'cause she had him put in jail. Then when Sary's mother died giving birth, Sary's father started drinking, she says, worse'n my pop. Only she found Stogolo and made friends with him. They mixed blood and swore peace on the grave of Sary's mother. And he taught her voodoo an' the devil-birth curse an' how to make love charms from hog liver an'—"

"I'm surprised at you, Joey," I interrupted. "Taking in that silly superstition! A boy who does as well as you in science! Mistress Sary—Sarietta grew up in a primitive community where people didn't know any better. But you do!"

He scuffed the weeds at the edge of the sidewalk with a swinging foot. "Yeah," he said in a low voice. "Yeah. I'm sorry I mentioned it, Mr. Flynn."

THEN he was off, a lithe streak in white blouse and corduroy knickers, tearing along the sidewalk to his home. I regretted my interruption, then, since Joey was rarely confidential and Sarietta spoke only when spoken to, even with her aunt.

I've regretted it much, *much* more ever since.

The weather grew surprisingly warmer. "I declare," Miss Drury told me one morning, "I've never seen a winter like this in my life. Indian summers and heat waves are one thing, but to go on this way day after day without any sign of a break, Land sake's!"

"Scientists say the entire earth is developing a warmer climate. Of course, it's almost imperceptible right now, but the Gulf Stream—"

"The Gulf Stream," she ridiculed. She wore the same starched and heavy clothes as always and the heat was reducing her short temper to a blazing point. "The Gulf Stream! Ever since that Hawn brat came to live in Nanville the world's been turning turtle. My chalk is always breaking, my desk drawers get stuck, the erasers fall apart—the little witch is trying to put a spell on me!"

"Now look here." I stopped and faced her with my back to the school building. "This has gone far enough. If you do have to believe in witchcraft, keep it out of your relations with the children. They're here to absorb knowledge, not the hysterical imaginings of a—of a—"

"Of a sour old maid. Yes, go ahead, say it," she snarled. "I know you think it, Mr. Flynn. You fawn all over her so she leaves you be. But I know what I know and so does that evil little thing you call Sarietta Hawn. It's war between us, and the all-embracing battle between good and evil will never be over until one or the other of us is dead!" She turned in a spiral of skirts and swept up the path into the schoolhouse.

I began to fear for her sanity then. I had not yet learned to fear for mine.

That was the day my arithmetic class entered slowly, quietly as if a bubble of silence enveloped them. The moment the door shut behind the last pupil, the bubble broke and whispers splattered all over the room.

"Where's Sarietta Hawn?" I asked. "And Joey Richards," I amended, unable to find him either.

Louise Bell rose, her starched pink dress curving in front of her scrawny body. "They've been naughty. Miss Drury caught Joey cutting a lock of hair off her head and she started to whip him. Then Mistress Sary stood up and said she wasn't to touch him because he was under her pro-tec-tion. So Miss Drury sent us all out and now I bet she's going to whip them both. She's real mad!"

I started for the back door rapidly. Abruptly a scream began. Sarietta's voice! I tore down the corridor. The scream rose

to a high treble, wavered for a second. Then stopped.

As I jolted open the door of Miss Drury's classroom, I was prepared for anything, including murder. I was not prepared for what I saw. I stood, my hand grasping the door knob, absorbing the tense tableau.

Joey Richards was backed against the blackboard, squeezing a long tendril of brownish hair in his sweaty right palm. Mistress Sary stood in front of Miss Drury, her head bent to expose a brutal red welt on the back of her chalky neck. And Miss Drury was looking stupidly at a fragment of birch in her hand; the rest of the rod lay in scattered pieces at her feet.

THE children saw me and came to life. Mistress Sary straightened and with set lips moved toward the door. Joey Richards leaned forward. He rubbed the lock of hair against the back of the teacher's dress, she completely oblivious to him. When he joined the girl at the door, I saw that the hair glistened with the perspiration picked up from Miss Drury's blouse.

At a slight nod from Mistress Sary, the boy passed the lock of hair over to her. She placed it very carefully in the pocket of her frock.

Then, without a single word, they both skipped around me on their way to join the rest of the class.

Evidently they were unharmed, at least seriously.

I walked over to Miss Drury. She was trembling violently and talking to herself. She never removed her eyes from the fragment of birch.

"It just flew to pieces. Flew to pieces! I was—when it flew to pieces!"

Placing an arm about her waist, I guided the spinster to a chair. She sat down and continued mumbling.

"Once—I just struck her once. I was raising my arm for another blow—the birch was over my head—when it flew to pieces. Joey was off in a corner—he couldn't have done it—the birch just flew to pieces." She stared at the piece of wood in her hand and rocked her body back and forth slowly, like one mourning a great loss.

I had a class. I got her a glass of water, notified the janitor to take care of her and hurried back.

Somebody, in a childish spirit of ridicule or meanness, had scrawled a large verse across the blackboard in my room:

"One, two, three alary—
I spy Mistress Sary
Sitting on a bumble-ary,
Just like a little fairy!"

I turned angrily to the class. I noticed a change in seating arrangements. Joey Richards' desk was empty.

He had taken his place with Mistress Sary in the long, deep shadows at the back of the room.

TO MY breathless relief, Mistress Sary didn't mention the incident. As always she was silent at the supper table, her eyes fixed rigidly on her plate. She excused herself the moment the meal was over and slipped away. Mrs. Clayton was evidently too bustling and talkative to have heard of it. There would be no repercussions from that quarter.

After supper I walked over to the old-fashioned gabled house where Miss Drury lived with her relatives. Lakes of perspiration formed on my body and I found it all but impossible to concentrate. Every leaf on every tree hung motionless in the humid, breezeless night.

The old teacher was feeling much better. But she refused to drop the matter; to do, as I suggested, her best to reestablish amity. She rocked herself back and forth in great scoops of the colonial rocking-chair and shook her head violently.

"No, no, *no!* I won't make friends with that imp of darkness: sooner shake hands with Beelzebub himself. She hates me now worse than ever because—don't you see—I forced her to declare herself. I've made her expose her witchery. Now—now I must grapple with her and overthrow her and Him who is her mentor. I must think, I must—only it's so devilishly hot. So very hot! My mind—my mind doesn't seem to work right." She wiped her forehead with the heavy cashmere shawl.

As I strolled back, I fumbled unhappily for a solution. Something would break

soon at this rate; then the school board would be down upon us with an investigation and the school would go to pot. I tried to go over the possibilities calmly but my clothes stuck to my body and breathing was almost drudgery.

Our porch was deserted. I saw movement in the garden and hurried over. Two shadows resolved into Mistress Sary and Joey Richards. They stared up as if waiting for me to declare myself.

She was squatting on the ground and holding a doll in her hands. A small wax doll with brownish hair planted in her head that was caught in a stern bun just like the bun Miss Drury affected. A stiff little doll with a dirty piece of muslin for a dress cut in the same long, severe pattern as all of Miss Drury's clothes. A carefully executed caricature in wax.

"Don't you think that's a bit silly," I managed to ask at last. "Miss Drury is sufficiently upset and sorry for what she did for you to play upon her superstitions in this horrible way. I'm sure if you try hard enough, we can all be friends."

They rose, Sarietta clutching the doll to her breast. "It is not silly, Mr. Flynn. That bad woman must be taught a lesson. A terrible lesson she will never forget. Excuse my abruptness, sir, but I have much work to do this night."

And then she was gone, a rustling patch of whiteness that slipped up the stairs and disappeared into the sleeping house.

I turned to the boy.

"Joey, you're a pretty smart fellow. Man to man now—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Flynn." He started for the gate. "I—I got to go home." I heard the rhythmic pad of his sneakers on the sidewalk grow faint and dissolve in the distance. I had evidently lost his allegiance.

Sleep came hard that night. I tossed on entangling sheets, dozed, came awake and dozed again.

ABOUT midnight, I woke shuddering. I punched the pillow and was about to attempt unconsciousness once more when my ears caught a faint note of sound. I recognized it. That was what had reached into my dreams and tugged my eyes open to fear. I sat upright.

Sarietta's voice!

She was singing a song, a rapid song with unrecognizable words. Higher and higher up the scale it went, and faster and faster as if there were some eerie deadline she had to meet. At last, when it seemed that she would shrill beyond the limits of human audibility, she paused. Then, on a note so high that my ear drums ached, came a drawn-out, flowing "Kurunoo O Stogoloooo!"

Silence.

Two hours later, I managed to fall asleep again.

THE sun burning redly through my eyelids wakened me. I dressed, feeling oddly listless and apathetic. I wasn't hungry and, for the first morning of my life, went without breakfast.

The heat came up from the sidewalk and drenched my face and hands. My feet felt the burning concrete through the soles of my shoes. Even the shade of the school building was an unnoticeable relief.

Miss Drury's appetite was gone too. She left her carefully wrapped lettuce sandwiches untouched on the basement table. She supported her head on her thin hands and stared at me out of red-rimmed eyes.

"It's so hot!" she whispered. "I can hardly stand it. Why everyone feels so sorry for that Hawn brat, I can't understand. Just because I made her sit in the sunlight. I've been suffering from this heat a thousand times more than she."

"You . . . . made—Sarietta . . . sit—in—"

"Of course I did! She's no privileged character. Always in the back of the room where it's cool and comfortable. I made her change her desk so that she's right near the large window, where the sunlight streams in. And she feels it too, let me tell you. Only—ever since, I've been feeling worse. As if I'm falling apart. I didn't have a wink of sleep last night—those terrible, terrible dreams: great hands pulling and mauling me, knives pricking my face and my hands—"

"But the child can't stand sunlight! She's an albino."

"Albino, fiddlesticks! She's a witch. She'll be making wax dolls next. Joey

Richards didn't try to cut my hair for a joke. He had orders to— Ooh!" She doubled in her chair. "Those cramps!"

I waited until the attack subsided and watched her sweaty, haggard face. "Funny that you should mention wax dolls. You have the girl so convinced that she's a witch that she's actually making them. Believe it or not, last night, after I left you—"

She had jumped to her feet and was rigid attention. One arm supporting her body against a steam pipe, she stood staring at me.

"She made a wax doll. Of me?"

"Well, you know how a child is. It was her idea of what you looked like. A little crude in design, but a good piece of workmanship. Personally, I think her talent merits encouragement."

Miss Drury hadn't heard me. "Cramps!" she mused. "And I thought they were cramps! She's been sticking pins into me! The little— I've got to— But I must be careful. Yet fast. Fast."

I got to my feet and tried to put my hand on her shoulder across the luncheon table. "Now pull yourself together. Surely this is going altogether too far."

She leaped away and stood near the stairs talking rapidly to herself. "I can't use a stick or a club—she controls them. But my hands—if I can get my hands on her and choke fast enough, she can't stop me. But I mustn't give her a chance," she almost sobbed, *"I mustn't give her a chance!"*

Then she had leaped up the stairs in a sudden, determined rush.

I swept the table out of my way and bolted after her.

MOST of the children were eating their lunches along the long board fence at the end of the school yard. But they had stopped now and were watching something with frightened fascination. Sandwiches hung suspended in front of open mouths. I followed the direction of their stares.

Miss Drury was slipping along the side of the building like an upright, skirted panther. She staggered now and then and held on to a wall. Some two feet in front of her, Sarietta Hawn and Joey Richards sat in the shade. They were looking intently at a wax doll in a muslin dress that had been set on the cement just outside the fringe of coolness. It lay on its back in the direct sunlight and, even at that distance, I could see it was melting.

"Hi," I shouted. "Miss Drury! Be sensible!" I ran for them.

At my cry, both children looked up startled. Miss Drury launched herself forward and fell, rather than leaped, on the little girl. Joey Richards grabbed the doll and rolled out of the way toward me. I tripped over him and hit the ground with a bone-breaking wallop. As I turned in mid-air, I caught a fast glimpse of Miss Drury's right hand flailing over the girl. Sarietta had huddled into a pathetic little bundle under the teacher's body.

I sat up facing Joey. Behind me the children were screaming as I had never heard them scream before.

Joey was squeezing the doll with both hands. As I watched, not daring to remove my eyes, the wax—already softened by the sunlight—lost its shape and came through the cracks in his tight freckled fingers. It dripped through the muslin dress and fell in blobs on the school yard cement.

Over and above the yells of the children, Miss Drury's voice rose to a mind-cracking scream and went on and on and on.

Joey looked over my shoulder with rolling eyes. But he kept on squeezing the doll and I kept my eyes on it desperately, prayerfully, while the screaming went on all about me and the immense sun pushed the perspiration steadily down my face. As the wax oozed through his fingers, he began singing suddenly in a breathless, hysterical cackle. Louder and louder grew his voice until it seemed to dominate the world:

"One, two, three alary—
I spy Mistress Sary
Sitting on a bumble-ary,
Just like a little fairy!"

And Miss Drury screamed and the children yelled and Joey sang, but I kept my eyes on the little wax doll. *I kept my eyes on the little wax doll drooling through the cracks of Joey Richards' strained, little fingers. I kept my eyes on the doll. . . .*

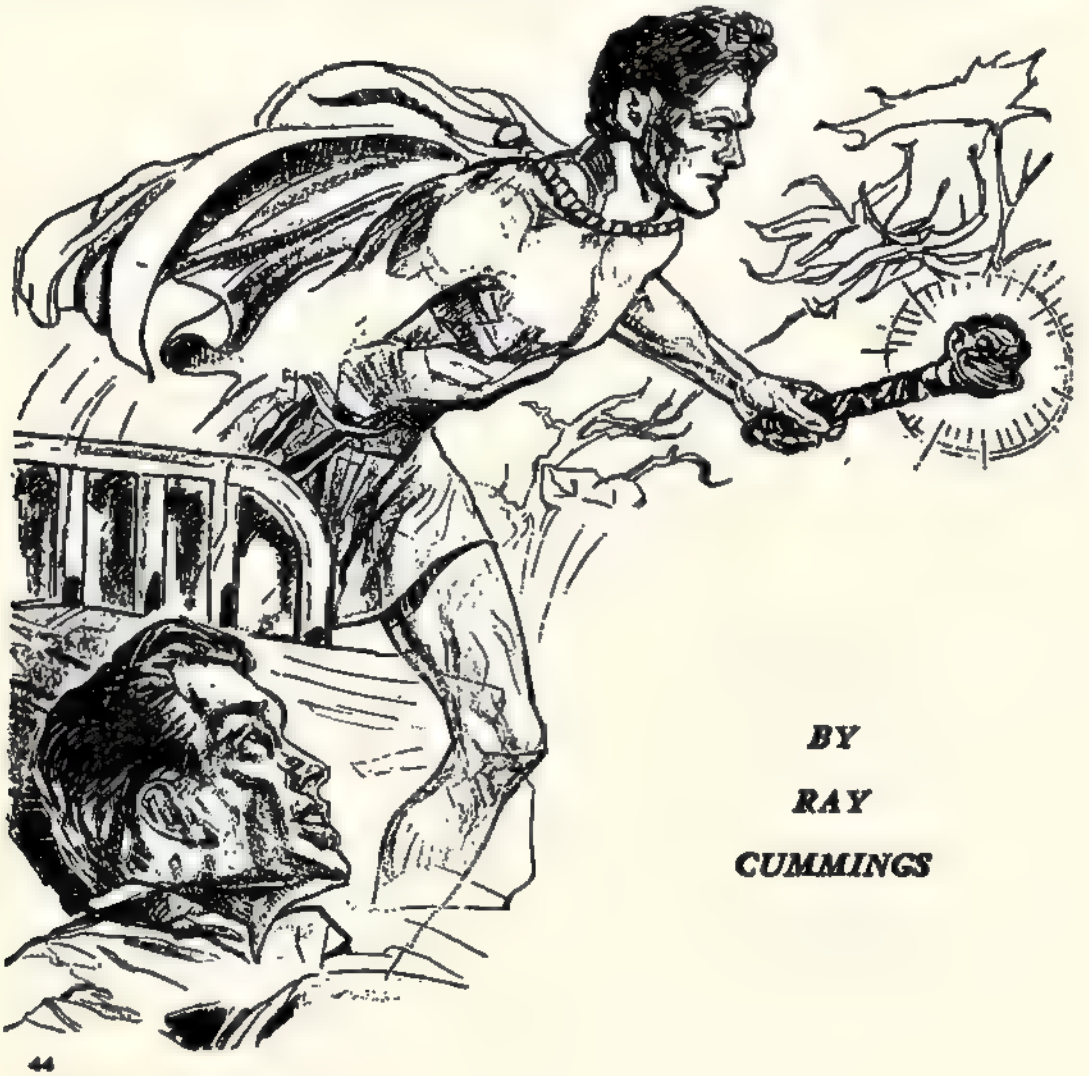
The Lifted Veil

HE LAY on his hospital bed, gazing at the patch of moonlight that shafted through the window and spread on the white bed covering. It was a pallid patch, crossed with a mockery of shadow bars magnified from the woven pattern of the filmy, white window curtains. He knew it was that, of course. But the bars seemed horribly sinister as they spread there over him.

He raised one knee. Just one knee, because the other was gone. His knee lifted the bed covering. The bars of shadow bent and shifted, but they did not break. Horrible confining things, black symbols of the black prison where what was left of Bob Hallen lay tortured by his thoughts.

He closed his eyes so that he would not see the bars. It was much better, because now the shimmering, orange-colored forest was before him. There was comfort, out in that strange distant shimmer. . . .

A fly buzzed over him, droning in the heavy silence of the summer evening. It



BY RAY CUMMINGS

landed on his dank forehead. He opened his eyes, and his left hand flicked the fly away—his left hand, and it seemed now that he could see again, as plainly as when it had happened that night in the tropic island palmy thicket, how his right arm had looked when the shrapnel had struck it. And how his right leg had looked as it had swelled and blackened.

Now the horror of men murdering each other was all over, and here were the mutilated remains of Bob Hallen, lying in the black prison of his thoughts, with the empty abyss of his future spread before him.

The shimmering forest seemed closer. . . .

"He's asleep." That was Nora's murmuring voice. And then his father's voice:

"Should we wake him up, nurse? Is it all right? Or perhaps he's had a sedative for the night? We shouldn't have come so late."

"No. It's all right, Mr. Hallen. He's probably not asleep."

He could see them as they stood hesitating in the doorway, with the corridor light edging their dark outlines.

"Go away," he said suddenly. "Go away. I want to sleep."

He could have talked for a little while with his father. But not with Nora. No. He never could talk with Nora again. Never see her.

It hurt too much. The thought of what might have been with Nora was the worst of all.

But they didn't go away. His father came forward, with Nora hesitating in the doorway. Behind her, the white figure of the

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

nurse moved back and merged with the corridor light and was gone.

"Hello, Bob."

"Hello, Dad."

"Feeling more spry tonight, eh, son? Well, that's fine." His father's voice was briskly cheerful. One must always exhude cheer for the brooding patient. The psychiatrist had probably said something like that. There wasn't anything the matter with Bob Hallen now, except just a psychoneurosis. How simple for science to explain away the wreck of a man who was all finished and knew it!

Then his father was sitting on the little white chair by the bed. "Shall I light the light, Bob?"

"Yes. Go ahead if you want to."

The small hooded light from the bedside table showed his father's thin figure with an outline of yellow; and it struck on his father's face where there was a cheerful smile so forced and phony that it could not hide his anxiety.

"They tell me you were up and around today, Bob," his father said. "That's good. And tomorrow—"

"Sure I was," he said, "in a wheelchair."

And then his father began the same argument all over again. "Any time you'll let them," his father said earnestly, "you can start learning how to use the new leg, Bob. And the arm—"

"Dad! Stop it! Stop it, I tell you!" Behind the small, bright glare of the table light, he could see the figure of Nora timidly standing there. Nora, to hear this gruesome talk of a leg and an arm—part of him irrevokably gone—sure, he had had a leg and an arm once and now they were lying somewhere, rotting, stinking, horrible. "You send her away!" he said. "You get her out of here!"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Bob." His father was frightened. "We won't talk of it, son."

"I told her yesterday never to come back! I told her!"

If only he could get away from all this torture! The shining, shimmering forest that he could see so plain and close was like a haven. . . . He was up on his one elbow in the bed now, glaring. And the slim little blob that was Nora behind the light seemed to be blurring. How idiotic for him to have tears in his eyes! A wreck of a man lying here and blubbering like a fool over it! He sank back, steadying himself by crumpling the bedsheet with his twitching left-hand fingers.

"Please go away, Nora," he said. "I told you—"

"Oh, Bob, dear—"

It was horrible to hear her voice with words like that. . . . Bob, dear. . . . Her voice and the way she had always said it, had echoed so many times in his dreams of what was going to be, with Nora.

"You go away," he said. "I don't want you here."

He closed his eyes to bar her. And now the strange comforting shimmer of the orange-colored forest with the jutting, ragged little line of hills behind it, seemed suddenly to take on a new reality. In the blankness beside him, he heard that his father had quietly risen from the bedside chair. Then there was a faint, wafting perfume from Nora, her nearness, the rustle of her summer dress.

He twitched as her hand caressed his hair; he tried to jerk his head away.

"Bob," she murmured, "look at me. Open your eyes."

"No," he said. "Go away, Nora."

"I want to talk to you, Bob." Her voice was quiet, but firm with a sudden, queer little command to it. And there was his father's voice saying softly:

"I'll wait outside, Nora."

"Please, Bob. Don't be stubborn."

Of course, he was childish, that's what she was thinking. Through his closed eyelids he could see now that there was a little glowing river winding through the forest; and there were mound-shaped brown things that clustered in a group all along the slope off to the left. Maybe they were houses? It was queer that everything out there was so much plainer tonight. Closer. So close that it seemed as though now he could smell the redolence of the vegetation. . . .

Then again there was Nora's voice: "Sure, we talked yesterday, Bob. But I just can't let it go at that. I want—want another chance to make you realize—"

At the stammer in her voice, he opened his eyes; and the light from the bed table was glistening in her soft brown hair; it

rippled all over her soft, blue summer dress and it glowed on her earnest little face where the waves of her hair were like a frame, just the way it had always been in his dreams of her.

She was trying to smile. "You must see I mean it, Bob. I love you. I love you just the same as—as before."

"You're sorry for me," he muttered bitterly.

"Sure, I am. But not very much. You're all right now, and I—I just want us to get married the way we always planned."

"Because you're sorry for me, and it's your duty. That's the kind of girl you are. I'm not a fool."

Then she was gazing at him sidewise, mustering that little roguish smile he had loved so much.

"Don't jilt me, Bob." Then she was serious. "What you're thinking about yourself—that's plain bunk. Remember how you used to say you'd conquer the world—for me? Well, you still can. A little harder, maybe, but you can still do it."

She was leaning down, trying to kiss him. And the what might have been stirred in him with a new horror that was unbearable.

"Go away! I can't stand it! Let me alone!"

He knew that he was screaming at her hysterically. He hadn't broken like this for a week or more; he'd held it in check.

"Get out of here! Get out of here! I want to be alone! You let me alone!"

THE Midge were worried. Frightened. Why not? There was the drumbeat of the Raans out there beyond the hills. The Raans were coming—they were coming again. . . . He could see the moving shapes of the frightened little Midge, here among their houses on the slope. Almost he could hear the distant, sinister drumbeats. . . .

"You get her out of here, I tell you!" He knew he was screaming it at Nora.

"Bob, dear—Oh I didn't mean to upset you!"

"You'd better leave, Nora." That was his father's frightened voice. "Nurse! Nurse! Come here quick!"

"You get out of here, all of you! I want to go to sleep! Let me alone!"

He hadn't gone to pieces like this for a long time. . . . Damn it, he mustn't let the Midge get frightened! There was too much to do here now!

Then he could hear the nurse saying hurriedly, "I'll get Dr. Allen to quiet him. You and Miss Blake had better leave now."

How silly to go to pieces and get hysterical. He fought to calm himself. He lay thinking about the drumbeats of the Raans and what should be done about it; and when Dr. Allen came, he said, "I'm all right, doc." His left arm waved away the hypodermic. "I don't need that, doc. I—I'm hanging onto myself now."

Then he had the hospital doctor pacified, and he was alone. Queer, he didn't have to close his eyes now to see the shining country of the Midge. It lay glowing off there beyond his bed . . . It still wasn't as plain as the room around him. It seemed as though there were a veil of mist here . . .

But the veil was lifting . . .

The hospital was very silent. He had been lying here for a long time, since Dr. Allen finally had left. He guessed it could be after midnight now. Outside his window there was the distant hum of traffic, a tiny voice blended of a myriad sounds . . . But of course he couldn't hear the drumbeats of the Raans, because they were too far away. It was the time of sleep in the Midge village, but no one was sleeping. There was too much alarm; too much to do; too much confusion.

They needed someone to plan for them now. Someone who wasn't afraid, and who could think clearly of what should be done to repel the Raans.

Bob started to get out of the hospital bed. But he relaxed, because that was silly. And now he was aware of the strangeness. Things coming into reality, and other things fading away . . . The traffic down on the highway—was it that? Or was it now the blended, distant, frightened little cries of the Midge? The hospital bed held him lightly. But he could feel it still, quite plainly. There was a bouyancy here; a lifting. A sense of lightness down into the very core of him; a thing that tingled like wine in his veins.

And there was an urgency. A pulling sense of urgency that queerly steadied his jangled nerves so that the last of the hysteria was gone because things now must be done.

And now he knew that the veil had lifted at last . . .

From the rocky hillside here where he was lying propped up on his elbow, he could see down the slope to the little valley, beyond which the ground rose up again and the orange-colored forest began, with the Midge village off to the left. The night air, stirring gently with a breeze, had a musk-like scent. That was the smell of the food-pods ripening.

He stood up on the rocks, balanced on his left foot. It was easy to stand, because there was such a lightness to him. A different gravity. Of course, that was it. The knowledge was like a memory. Yet it was a little different from that. The instinct of knowledge. The smell of the food-pods ripening. The Midge. The Raans. Things he never had known before, but now seemed instinctively coming to him, so that they were natural, not strange. A gravity which might make him weigh fifteen or twenty pounds, instead of his normal hundred and forty. It brought a lightness, a sense of untrammeled freedom.

He could hear the voices of the Midge quite plainly now as they wafted across the little valley and up the slope, carried by the redolent night-breeze. He must join them. He bent his left knee and made a leap; and his body sailed in an arc through the shimmering air and landed twenty or thirty feet down the slope. He laughed a little as he wobbled, fell and picked himself up. Of course! The damned right leg was gone, and this was something new. The bound stump of his right arm waved as though to balance him. Then he was aware of the brown fabric drape that clothed him—a sort of round-necked tunic with crescent-shaped shoulder lines upturned; a belt that bound him at the waist, and the drapes falling almost to his knee. In his left hand there was a stone or metal shaft, like a spear. A weapon? It could not be that, because it had a small gargoyle image at the end of it. Queer, he had no instinctive knowledge of what it was. And then he understood, because it was something new; something unusual, like his missing right arm and leg.

He was poised for another leap down the slope, when suddenly there was a movement among the shadowed rocks near him. A little gray-blue blob. One of the Midge. Then as he stood up, he saw her more clearly! a young girl, with her gray-blue drapes, somewhat like his own, clinging to her slim brown body, waving with her long, pale hair in the night-breeze.

It came to Bob Hallen then—a shafting stray thought across the background of his mind—that the Midge were fashioned in a very human mould, only smaller, more frail, with a birdlike quality to their little pointed faces. This girl was barely four feet tall, as she stood there on the rock mutely staring at him—a fragile little thing, and you would expect her to hop over the rocks like a bird. But she wouldn't, of course. She would walk with stiff, jerky little steps, or she would awkwardly run because despite this slight gravity, her strength was equally slight. . . .

She was staring, frightened, but mostly with wonderment. And Bob said suddenly,

"Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you."

"No," she said. "No. I am not afraid. You will not hurt me. That is true. I can feel it." Her tone was different from his, but not unmusical. Her words came in little, breathless jerks. Of course. All the young Midge spoke like that. The impetuousness of youth. When they got older, their speech was more measured. The savage Raans were different. The same language, but spoken with a heavy guttural slur. A slow, dull-witted, ponderous speech.

"What's your name?" he said.

"I am Nyah. The family of Megano."

"Megano?" he said. "Oh yes, I remember —No, I don't mean that. I mean I know—Megano, they call him the Ancient One."

"Yes," she said. "What is your name? I have not seen you before. Not anyone, like you."

"I'm Bob," he said. "Bob Hallen."

Strange dialogue. Again Bob's normal memories came to mingle with this which now was his reality. Was this English they were talking? It sounded so. His thoughts were couched in it. But he knew it wasn't, because it was the language of the Midge.

"You have the Mace," she said. "I have never seen it before." She smiled a little. "I did not really believe it existed. I did not. I thought it was just a symbol. Because nobody ever really had seen it."

"Well, you see it now," he said. "And the Raans are coming—"

Fear swept her. "The Raans! I had forgotten. You must come! Megano sent me up here—"

"To meet me?"

"Yes. He said he thought there would be the Mace—"

It was hard for him to hop with short enough leaps not to outdistance the running little Nyah. And then the awed, jabbering Midge were around them as they advanced into the group of mound-shaped dwellings.

"You keep back!" Nyah called.

"The Mace! He carries the Mace!" . . .

"The Raans will feel its power now!" . . .

"He brings the Mace! We need not fear the Raans now!" . . .

The jabbering Midge, men, and women with children in their arms, and larger children clinging to them, all surged forward, with little Nyah ordering them back. In the midst of it, Bob Hallen stood towering over them, balanced on his single left leg and with the shining Mace in his left hand. He was smiling whimsically, because still there were his normal memories, and the oddness of all this made him smile. To the Midge he was a miracle, come to them now bearing the fabled Mace, with its invincible magic power of Right and Justice to triumph over all that was evil. . . .

"And now we need not fear the Raans. . . ."

"Megano said he might come!"

"You better get me into Megano's dwelling," Bob said hurriedly to Nyah.

"Yes, it is here."

He had to be careful, hopping in through its small brown doorway. And then in the dim draped room, the small, shriveled figure of Megano sat staring at him in a moment of silent awe.

"You came?" Megano murmured at last. "I did hope that it was true and you would come." His wizened, birdlike face with the wide slit of mouth of the very old, wrinkled into a smile of welcome. But still his slow, thoughtful voice was awed. "What is your name"

"Bob. Bob Hallen."

"It sounds strange to us. But of course, that is natural. Are you thirsty and hungry? Nyah, have Rotan bring food and drink."

"I have it here," Rotan said.

Bob gazed at the halfbreed. There were only a few of them, and Rotan was typical —a heavy-set fellow, lumpish with slack flesh. He was a little taller than the Midge.

The servant here; he set the crushed food-pod paste and the spicy drink before Bob, and then melted back respectfully into the shadows of an inner doorway.

"You knew I was coming?" Bob said. "A different world—how could you know anything about me, and my world?"

"About you—nothing," Megano said. "But I am very old. There was a time when it was thought that I was dying. To me, it was like a vision, very brief, given to me. I saw your big world so near us in the stream of Time. And I understood it, or it seemed that I did, just a little."

"Dying?" Bob said. "Then—am I dead? In my own world up there—am I dead?" Queer that the thought should bring, not exactly horror, but more a wonderment.

"Dead?" Megano echoed. "No, I do not think so. You are here to help us. And you bring the Mace. That is beyond science, or metaphysics. More in the nature of a miracle, not to be explained perhaps. Or perhaps it is just an outward symbol of your ability to help us."

"I want to help you," Bob said.

"I know it." The ancient Megano smiled again so that his little brown face was a wrinkled knot around his pointed nose. "I have—all my Midge here, we have an instinct of trust in you. Here to help us. And I think too, that you are here for another purpose."

"What?" Bob asked.

"I do not know." He turned to Nyah, who was sitting peering from one to the other of them with her quick glance. "You, Nyah—it was you who told me he was coming. Just a little while ago, and then he came."

"You?" Bob said. "You knew—"

"There was a great need," Nyah said softly. Her voice seemed awed, and puzzled. "I did not understand anything, but there was great unhappiness—fear—"

"The young female can often sense things beyond her understanding," Megano said.

"You mean, fear that the Raans were coming?" Bob said. He started from his seat. "And we're sitting here talking, when—"

Megano waved him back. "There is time. They come slowly—a horde of them through the Lower Passage, but there is time."

"Fear of the Raans," Nyah said. "Yes. That. And there was something else. It was like a vision or a dream. There was a dark place with a small light to the side and I was very frightened. I wanted to help, but I could not."

"But she seemed to know that you were coming," Megano put in. "Our worlds, it seems to me, are very close. It is as though we were just a little echo of you."

A co-existing realm. The Fourth Dimension. A different segment of a branching Time-stream. . . . Bob had often read of such things, but after all, who could explain them? Was this something like that? It seemed so. And yet, somehow it seemed not quite that either. . . .

"My human body is here," Bob said. "Did some force alter its state of being—" He groped to try and phrase it so that it might be a rational thing of factual science.

"A force," Megano said, "but it could be the force of the human mind. *There* is the real miracle of science, Bob Hallen! The human mind. A thought. A memory. What are they? And human Reason. What process is it? Thought is the Great Unknown. And it can do strange things to Time. Shorten it. Hasten it. Sometimes almost obliterate it altogether."

"Yes, everyone experiences that," Bob agreed.

"And thought—yours, and Nyah's too, perhaps—altered the Time-factor of your existence, brought you here."

"And I've never been here before?"

"No. I think not. But when here, you are part of us. A knowledge of us is with you." Megano was slowly pondering it, with the wisdom of his long life behind him. "I think you have had no connection with us here, until now.

"But it seems to me that others of us here, sometimes, have an aura of something within them from your world. Like a little echo, linking them—"

A noise outside the dwelling mound interrupted him. There was a shadow in the doorway. A Midge man came hurriedly in. His breath was a little cloud like steam from his parted mouth. He had been running, and the radiant heat from his body rose over him in visible waves.

"Boyne," Megano said. "You Boyne, what is—"

"I was in the hills where you sent me to watch," Boyne gasped. "And the Raan horde is not coming by the Lower Passage! A few of them went there yesterday and beat the deathdrums there, but that was to fool us! They come by the—"

The words died in his gasping mouth. Bob saw a little flick of shining thing come in the window beside the messenger. It struck him in the chest. There was a gruesome, gurgling hiss as the inner-pressure of the body tissue came out through the wound. His shriveling body spun for an instant on his twisting little legs, and then he fell.

THE messenger had been silenced before he could tell about the oncoming Raans! Killed by someone from outside, with a blowtube! Bob was out of his seat, balanced on his left leg. His left arm gestured to the terrified Nyah and Megano.

"Stay inside!" he said. A single hop took him to the doorway. He crouched as he went through, fell outside. Then he was up again. Out beyond two of the shadowed mound-dwellings, a brown-clad figure was running in the glowing dimness.

A leap took Bob over the nearest of the little houses, and as he landed he saw the figure again, clinging to the shadows as it ran. Another sailing leap . . . Another . . . There was a strangely wild, fierce exultation to it. The pursuit of a killer . . . Bob had ignored the Mace, which he had carefully stood beside him in Megano's room. The Mace was only a symbol; a thing to inspire the Midge. But Bob Hallen knew his power now; knew it; exulted in it; a thing that was a great need to him so that now as he felt it, there was almost an unreasoning sweep of triumph within him. . . .

He was muttering, "You damned little murderer! When I get hold of you—"

And the running figure saw him coming. The fugitive gave a gasp as the big bulk of Bob came with a sailing leap over him, balanced and turned to seize him.

"Rotan! Why you damned little murderous traitor—"

It was the halfbreed. He had dropped his

blowtube. He tried to duck away, but with a lunge Bob was on him.

"Got you! You damned little—"

Rotan screamed. But that was all. A single gruesome, gurgling scream as Bob's body bore him down. A horror . . . There was nothing in Bob's endowment of knowledge to warn him of this horror as like a brittle-shelled insect the body of Rotan smashed within his grip and under his pouncing weight . . . Then Bob scrambled off the welter, rubbing dirt from the ground upon himself, and dirt to cleanse his hands.

Noisome . . . horrible. . . .

Then he went bounding back to the dim room where Megano and Nyah bent over the fallen messenger.

"I got him," Bob said grimly. "He's lying out there—it was that cursed Rotan—"

"And I trusted him," Megano said. "I should not have done that."

"Bend down," Nyah said. "Quickly now. He tries to speak."

The little messenger was not dead, but he was quickly dying now. Bob bent down.

"Speak, Boyne. Tell us. Not coming by the Lower Passage—"

"They come—over the Top Ridge—high above the glow—"

Above the glow of the orange-colored forest! Up through the pass, high up on the Dividing Ridge! But that was up where the Invisible Things lurked! The monstrous Invisible Things that were afraid of the orange-colored radiation from the forests so that they only lurked high in the crags! And the Raans dared to come that way!

Megano gasped, "Why—why, how do they dare?"

"Not too great a chance maybe," Bob said. "They figure we would never expect them by that route, and if they could surprise us, getting down here in the open—a horde of them—" He stooped back to the ground. "When are they coming, Boyne? How far away are they now?"

But the little messenger lay shriveled in death.

"Up by the Invisible Things?" Nyah gasped. "Our men must go there to stop the Raans? But they will not! They will be too frightened!"

Frightened indeed. But when the strange towering figure balanced on the single leg and with the Great Miracle of the Mace in his hand stood among them, they would go. They jabbered it, gathering in a milling group.

"I don't want many," Bob said. "We won't need it to turn them back."

Queer exultation of his power. It was as though all his life he had been waiting for this chance to show what a man can do. Not to anyone else, but just to show himself. And the thought was in him as at the head of his little army of about a hundred of the Midge, he hopped forward with restrained, sailing leaps. It was a strange thought. The doubled background of his mind contemplated it with a vague wonderment. All this, so vital to the Midge. A thing of life or death. To Bob Hallen it was a demonstration. Like the Mace—a symbol. A symbol of what a man can do. . . .

He could not shake the thought. But at last, when they had passed beyond the orange glow of the forests, and were up in the jagged, naked brown hilltops, the thought dropped from him in the grim emergency that was here for the Midge. . . .

And now, wafting up from down beyond the Divide, came the muffled, hollow beat of the deathdrums of the Raans. Then he and the gathered Midge could see them—the massed horde of them coming in a slow, long line to enter the narrow pass here among the crags.

Bob dispersed his Midge along the top brink of the rocky defile. It was a narrow, winding canyon, twenty or thirty feet wide in places, and equally as deep, straggling through the broken, tumbled summit of the Divide. The little Midge army was fully equipped in its simple, primitive fashion with the small Midge blowtubes and with an array of crude spears, clubs and bludgeons. And with headgear and padded garments to resist the lethal darts the Raans would send.

Primitive, odd little battle. But it was critical to these frightened, excited little Midge. And to Bob Hallen as he hopped in his great sailing leaps from one crag to another, the singular feeling still lurked that here was something of terrible import for him as well.

An ambush. The oncoming Raans thought that the Midge would oppose them in the

Lower Passage. Their drumbeats were stilled now. Silently they came, like a great line of slugs shoving forward. Already the first of them had entered the defile, not more than what would be half an Earth-mile from where the Midge were crouching on the upper brink. Bob chuckled. The dull-witted Raans were in for a surprise.

But there was the gruesome threat, up here, of the Invisible Things. Strange monsters that hovered in the glowing purple air, away from the orange sheen of the forests which they feared. Perhaps they might not attack the living; but like vultures they would come pouncing upon the dead, and the maimed.

"Wait until I order you to attack," Bob called softly. "In a few minutes now."

Then at last the moving lines of the Raans were passing along the defile beneath him, sluggish, lumpy brown figures of men, grotesque travesties of humans. Dull-witted, slow of mind and body, they moved with dragging steps. Enemies that were dangerous, only because there were so many of them. Some were unarmed; some carried chunks of rock, and slabs of stone and wood for bludgeons. And some of them had blowtubes.

Bob cast an apprehensive glance up into the purple air; and then he stood up, shouting to the Midge. . . .

It was a brief conflict, briefer even than Bob had hoped. A wave of the tiny whizzing darts went down upon the Raans. Some went wild; others found their mark, with gruesome little puffs as the brown bodies shriveled and fell. Then the Midge were tumbling loose rocks over the brink, rocks that crashed down, mashing the brown shapes.

In that first moment of the surprise attack, the curving segment of the canyon here was a gruesome mass of struggling Raans. Their shouts and guttural screams came up. Over the piled bodies of the weltering dead, the others struggled and milled in confusion. A few sent up darts. Near Bob a little Midge tumbled and fell. Beside him, another was struggling to shove a boulder over the lip of the brink. It resisted his puny efforts, but with a twenty foot leap, Bob was there. With his shoulder hunched against the big rock, he shoved. So easy, here in this little world! The great boulder stirred, rolled, went down into the chaos below.

Then Bob was everywhere, almost at once, with his great sailing leaps landing at some vantage point to shove a rock, and then another. A leap took him over the width of the canyon itself, where on the other side a mass of loose rock was lying. He sent it down in a clattering little avalanche. From the canyon now the guttural screams were a weird horror. But from around the bend new columns of the Raans pressed doggedly forward, climbing upon the slimy, weltering mass of the dead and the dying.

And Bob saw that a column of them had climbed to the top of the defile. They were pressing forward with a group of the now terrified little Midge blowing darts at them. With a leap, Bob was there. The waving Mace in his left hand was a symbol, but it was a weapon as well. His swinging blows with it gruesomely crashed through the lumps of brown bodies. Then Bob had a mass of them around him at once, dumb brown lumps of humans that screamed as they pressed at him. Behind him he could see some of the Midge, standing stricken, watching with frightened awe. With a leap he was out of the brown waves of flesh that threatened to engulf him, landing behind them. He had dropped the Mace now. He seized one of the screaming Raans by the legs, whirled him crashing against others. Then he was tumbling them bodily over the brink.

Down in the canyon now there was a new horror. The whining swoop of a pouncing, dropping Unseen Thing from above. And then another. For a moment Bob stared, with his heart pounding and his flesh crawling. In a little shadow down there, he could see faintly the palpitating pink outline of the monster as it mouthed the mangled Raan bodies... tearing them apart... some of the weltering parts now were weirdly scattering, sailing upward, carried away by the monstrous Unseen Things that fought with each other as they went. . . .

Brief, horrible little struggle. The Raans pressing forward around the bend in the canyon had stopped now; milling about, trampling each other. Then they were turning back in a rout with the whining Unseen Things hovering over them, waiting to

pounce. A rout. It spread back to all the lines of Raan columns down the further slope of the Divide—a screaming, terrified rout. And now the Raan deathdrums were sounding again. But not the rhythmic beat of the advance to battle. This was the chattering dirge of defeat, a wail of it starting here and spreading back into the dim dark distance down the slope of the Divide. . . .

BOB had long since drawn his Midge away. They stood in a chattering, triumphant group around him. . . . The dirge of the Raan drumbeats was fading into the shadowy lower distance. From the canyon the last of the whining things rose up and was gone. . . .

And Bob felt the awe of the Midge as they gazed silently at him. There was a thrill to it. But queerly he felt suddenly humble, with a thankfulness that what he had wanted to do, had been done. . . . Quietly he turned the Midge back toward the orange-colored glow of their protecting forests down the slope. . . .

A hero. He stood, feeling very strange inside as the Midge jabbered around him, back in the village of little mound-shaped dwellings. And the ancient Megano was here, thanking him, but not so much with awe, just a thoughtful smile of welcome and praise.

Then later he was sitting in the glowing dimness outside Megano's mound, with Nyah; and the little Midge girl wanted to hear all about it. But he tried to wave it away. He was thinking of something else, something which somehow seemed very important.

"Nyah," he said, "When you first got the idea that there was a need here—"

"The Raans," she said. "I was so afraid."

"Yes, I know. But you said—you had some sort of vision or something. You were in a dark place, with a small light to the side."

"Yes, I remember. I was very frightened."

"About me, maybe? Could it have been you were frightened about me?" He held his breath.

"You?" she said. Her luminous little eyes widened with wonderment. "You? But I knew nothing about you. There were voices and I was very frightened. About—about the Raans, I guess. How could it have been anything else?"

How indeed? "Of course, of course," he said.

This world, like a little echo of his own. Something here, that had come into this tiny eddy of the Time-stream, and was here for a purpose? Something just a little beyond human understanding? A tiny thread of the vast fabric of the Unknown? Was it that?

But little Nyah already had forgotten his questions. She was gazing at the orange dimness around them. "I am surely glad you came," she murmured.

And then she was looking at him archly—a queer little roguish side glance. His heart leaped. . . . This little whimsical, impish smile. . . .

"Why—why—" He choked back the words. And suddenly there was a confusion here within him; a blurring of unreality so that the orange haze was swimming into a mist. . . .

A mist like a veil. . . .

And things were pulling at him. A little pulling here to hold him, but something else dragging him away. . . .

An orange mist, like a veil. But it was a lifting veil because now there was a little spot of yellow glow here beside him. And a low, distant murmur. A murmur of far-away sound that was coming in the window. Of course. That was it . . . Nora . . . It was his thought of Nora that was lifting the veil, drawing him back. Because he was up on his elbow now, he could see between the filmy white window curtains out to where the murmuring sound was the traffic on the highway.

The little light was burning on the table beside his hospital bed. He reached and turned it off, because now the dawnlight was coming in the window. The white little room was brightening with the rose-glow of it.

A man can do so much, if he wants to try. . . .

He was glad it was early. There was a lot to do today. He lay pondering it. That little business which he had always planned with Nora, to be started when the damnable affair overseas was wound up. A little business can grow pretty fast, if you handle it right. The Government would help him

finance it. In a year or so, it would expand maybe so he could open a branch. A business can grow to any size, if you stick at it. If it needed more capital his father had plenty of collateral. His father's signature on his notes would turn them into cash in a hurry at any bank. Or maybe the expanding business would be able to finance itself. That would be better.

Sure were a lot of things to do. But you couldn't hop around on one damn leg with thirty foot leaps the way he'd been doing. Not here.

He'd have to get that new leg and arm in action right away.

He lay pondering it. And he wanted to tell Nora about it all. He wanted that most of everything.

He reached for the telephone, which was on the bedside table.

"But Mr. Hallen," the hospital operator protested. "So early? It's hardly daybreak. Is anything wrong? You'd better buzz for the nurse. She'll help you. Don't get excited now—you're all right."

"Don't let's be silly, shall we?" he said. "Sure I'm all right. I'll buzz the nurse because I want some breakfast. But this outside call's important. Put it through, please."

He could hear her dialing the number. He sat waiting for Nora's voice.

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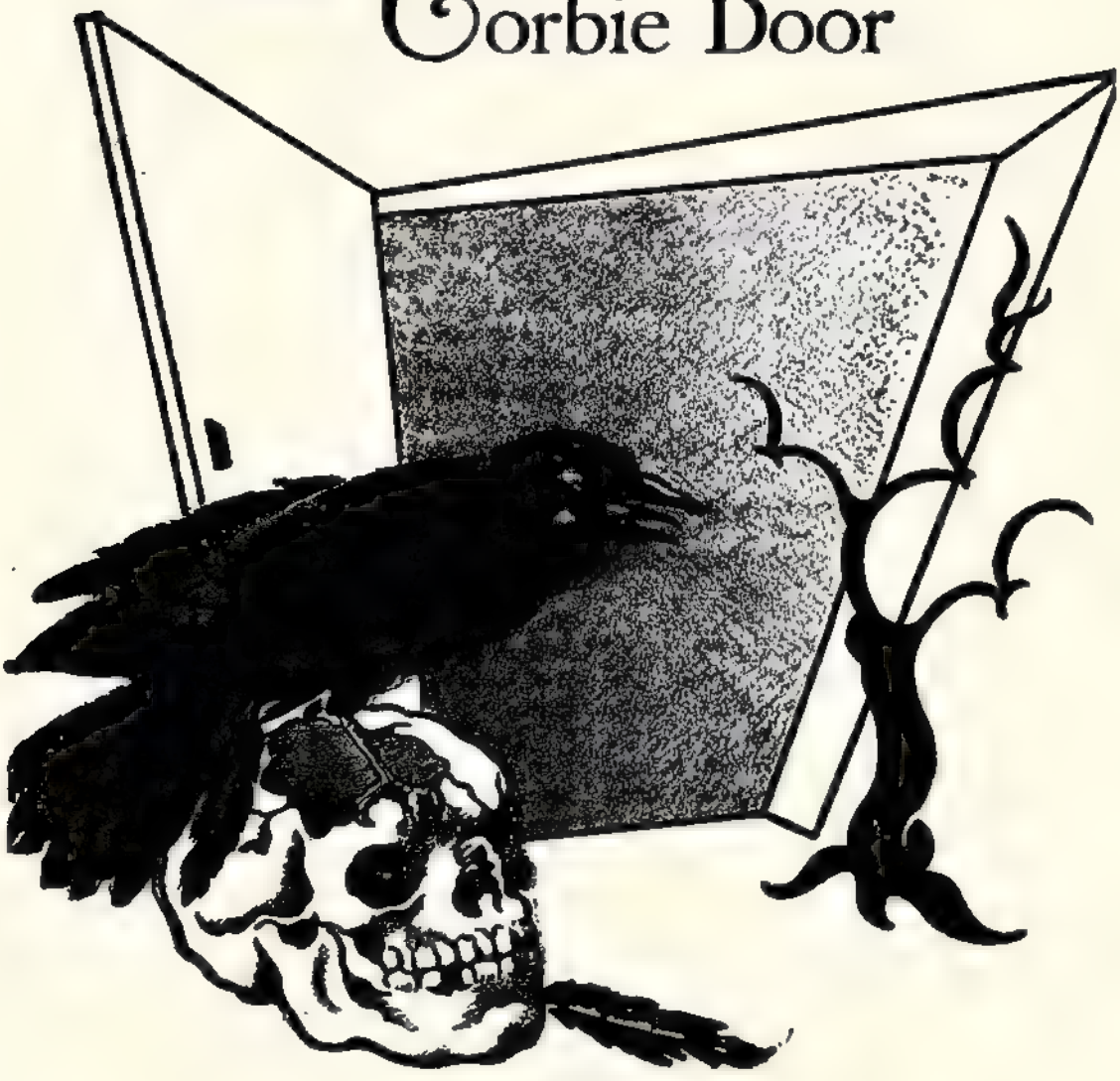

BY CARL JACOBI

ON THE eighteenth of June I received word from my solicitor that the final papers had been signed and everything was ready for my occupancy of Corbie House. The long months of litigation over my uncle's estate were thus at an end, and there was no longer the necessity of spending the sultry months in a Blooms-

The door that leads to the past must never be opened all the way!

Heading by M. N. BEALE

bury flat, a prospect which, considering the delicate condition of my wife's health, had loomed as an ordeal.

Debora and I acted at once. We closed up the flat; I arranged to have young Ames take over my business until further notice; and we caught the 4:30 train for Langham. Until the train rolled out of Paddington we were in good spirits, bouyant with the expectancy of a new life. Then the sky became overcast and a drizzle of rain began to fall. Debora's mood, always susceptible to weather changes, dampened perceptibly.

"How long has the house been closed?" she asked suddenly, and added, "Perhaps the roof leaks."

I laughed. "I think you'll find the roof quite solid. Uncle Charles lived all his life in Corbie House until his health forced him to move two years ago. Besides, I've wired ahead to the caretaker to have things ready for us."

I DROWSED the rest of the way until the train pulled into Langham. The station was not an impressive one, but the village which lay just beyond, its central street running in a curious ellipse, looked quite cheerful with its many lights gleaming through the mist. The caretaker was there to meet us, a heavyset Lancashireman, seemingly as old as his car.

He greeted us in a dull toneless voice and offered no further comment during the half hour's ride that followed. In the darkness with only the dim lights from the old car to light the twisting road, I saw no landmarks to touch a responsive chord in my memory. There were ugly drainage ditches where I had expected stately columns of trees, and rough granite outcroppings where I had pictured broad fields and meadows. Still, almost thirty years had passed since I had been here, and childhood recollections I knew, were apt to be fleeting. Then the car drew up, and the driver said shortly, "Here we are, sir. Corbie House."

The manor house, however, was much as I remembered it: a quadrangular structure of mixed Tudor and Jacobean architecture, with mullioned windows, octagonal towers, and fantastic chimneys. Those chimneys—the correct counting of which had always bedeviled me as a youngster—seemed to stand even higher now, outlined as they were against the grey-black sky.

Inside, the walls were all paneled in the Gothic style, and the ceilings presented some fine examples of Florentine and Siennese fresco painting, which apparently had dulled but little in the more than four centuries that had passed. There was dust in some of the darker corners, and a pile of furniture jackets near the doorway showed that the place had been given a hasty and desultory cleaning.

Memories came flooding down upon me as we passed through the silent rooms. I was glad to see that Uncle Charles, while maintaining to a remarkable degree the period authenticity of the structure, had not hesitated to install modern conveniences. There were electric lights, baths with showers, and even a telephone.

Debora had scarcely time to select one of the smaller chambers for our room when a ring at the bell announced a visitor. He rushed in almost as I turned the latch, seized my hand and began pumping it up and down.

"I'm Eldridge," he said breezily. "Dennison Eldridge. Live in the village, you know. Your caretaker told me you were coming down. Awfully glad. I shouldn't have barged in on you before you had a chance to settle, I know. But I'm so very much interested in this house I just had to."

HE WAS a tall gangly man of about thirty with receding mouse-colored hair and a cleft chin. His eyes avoided my gaze in the nervous way some persons have, and noting this, I put him down as an introvert of the first water. A rather unstable fellow too, I judged, for what other would choose such a time for a call.

"Yes," he went on, "this house has been a hobby of mine for more than a year. Your Uncle Charles didn't care for the idea, though. Testy old gentleman."

I was a little short with Eldridge, but for politeness sake I did ask him what in particular interested him about this house. At that, he looked at me over the match with which he was lighting his pipe, until the flame touched his fingertips.

"You mean you don't know?" he said slowly.

"Know what?"

Quickly he lit another match. "Oh nothing in particular. A few legends, some old wives' tales. I'll tell you about them sometime."

But there was an odd look in his eyes as a quarter of an hour later he took up his tweed cap and went out the door.

"I'll be back in a day or so," he said. "And I shall probably be rather a pest from then on."

He went swinging off into the rainy darkness accompanied by the caretaker. I had asked the latter to stay on as a servant, for a time at least, but the man had quietly refused, explaining that he had other duties.

Our first night in the manor was thus spent alone. Debora and I retired early, but I lay awake for hours as usual, unable to court sleep. I wondered if this change of environment would be of benefit to my wife. Her attitude of mind had concerned me during recent months. It was not so much the things she did as it was her failure to concord with me in the conception of things we both saw. There was the matter of the button on my waistcoat, for one thing. It was forever turning bluish in color, probably from the effects of a cheap dye. But she would insist with an odd strained sort of insistence that it was the same as the others.

Finally I dropped off, only to awaken suddenly just before dawn. The manor was steeped in silence, and the only sound was the rapid ticking of Debora's traveling-clock. The night breeze billowed inward the drapes of the open casement.

For several moments I lay there, wide awake and unmoving. Then I got up, put on a pair of slippers and paced to the window. Below, the grounds were tesselated in shadow and, save for a distant croaking of frogs, a deep hush lay over the countryside. But although the house was silent now, the impression persisted that I had been awakened by a cry from somewhere in the recesses of these halls. And though I had no way of being sure, I was certain that that cry had been a woman's scream.

THE following morning I called London and made arrangements to have three servants sent to Corbie House. The agency promised to have a cook, a serving maid, and a general man at the manor by nightfall. This done, I proceeded to make a survey of the grounds.

They were in a wild and neglected state. On the south side the one-time broad lawn was overrun with gorse, and here stood the remnants of a large three-tier fountain. Scattered about were a dozen or more statues. Most of these images were in a state of decay; heads were missing on some; on others arms and legs had broken off; and all were crude likenesses of Roman deities. Their presence puzzled me, for although the manor might conceivably have been erected on Roman ruins, it was, of course, impossible to believe these images dated to such a remote period. Leading away from the fountain was a double row of tall stately columns. Each of these had been surmounted by a stone corbie, but the majority of the bird images had long ago fallen from their perches and lay shattered and half buried in the rank undergrowth.

Shortly before noon I came upon a large door opening into the side wall. I stood staring at it, a huge barrier constructed of weathered bronze, with great hand-hammered hinges. On either panel was carved a life-size corbie, entwined with what was apparently mistletoe, and in the center, partially obliterated, was a small death's head. The door was a full inch smaller than its frame, suggesting that it had been taken from some other part of the house and mounted here as a makeshift.

I opened it. Before me stretched two narrow passages, both curving inward toward a common center and fashioned of very old stone. I switched on a pocket flash and entered the right hand passage. Sixty steps, and I was back where I had started. The two corridors were nothing more than a complete circle, beginning and ending at the door.

There seemed no reason for such a passage. But as I stood there, gazing back at it, I caught myself growing tense again. It was fancy, of course, nothing more; yet for an instant I thought I had heard from far off the wavering cry of a woman in mortal agony.

When I returned to the house I found Debora in an uneasy state. She had spent the morning dusting and rearranging the

furniture of some of the lower floor rooms. In the library she had glanced at several books, all of which were furnished in rich and costly bindings, and had read passages from a number of them.

"Robert," she said slowly, "these books are evil. We must get rid of them."

Macabre in subject matter, they certainly were. There was a copy of Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, Herzog's *Furchtbare Kulte*, an incomplete and heavily expurgated edition of de Korlette's *Cultes des Goules*, and several bound manuscripts which apparently were journals of the various masters of Corbie House. I saw then that it was these last that had disturbed Debora. Not journals in the true sense, but a series of badly-scrawled essays, all of them seemed to deal with a history of the Druids and the black rites of Druidic worship.

These essays began prosaicly enough, but led into descriptions of the horrible sacrifices and pagan acts committed by the ancient Celts in pre-Norman conquest days. There were narratives so involved and so filled with festering horror I was led to believe the writers had not limited themselves to fact, but had set down the vagaries of what were undoubtedly diseased minds. This puzzled me somewhat, for though I knew practically nothing of Uncle Charlie's side of the family, neither was I aware of any mental variances on the part of his ancestors.

I returned the volumes to the shelves and sought to soothe my wife. At two p.m. the servants arrived. There were two instead of the three I had ordered. The man, a taciturn Scot of middle age, had apparently seen better days. The woman appeared efficient enough, but seemed emotionally disturbed over something.

DINNER that night was a rather unpleasant affair. The woman grumbled at being asked to start work before "she was decently settled;" and the man interrupted us rudely to demand he be given a different room, though for the life of me I could see nothing wrong with the one he had. My wife complained of a headache and retired early, but I chose to stay up a while and read. I made the rounds of the lower floor rooms, locking the doors and securing the casements. I drank a glass of peach brandy which I had brought down from London and which for many years had been my favorite nightcap. Then I went into the library.

I chose Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* as a sleep tempter. For two chapters I read along, puffing a pipe, vaguely aware that I was becoming drowsy. Then my pipe went out, and I laid the book down to refill it. Suddenly I paused, listening. Save for the slow and methodical ticking of a pendulum clock somewhere, the great house was blanketed in silence. And yet again I had the impression that far off, at the limit of my hearing range, I had heard a woman's scream.

My first thought was for Debora. I went to her room, but a glance at the heavy canopied bed showed her sleeping peacefully. I returned to the library and heard it again even as I stepped through the doorway. Not imagination this time, but a definite cry that came from somewhere without the house. I let myself out into the grounds, headed slowly across the wet flagstones in the direction of the ruined fountain. The rain had ceased, but a strong gusty wind still tossed the branches of the oak trees. Up in the eastern sky a full moon was scudding through the cloud wrack.

Presently I came upon the door, the presence of which had so puzzled me earlier in the day. It was open, though I remembered closing it when I left the circular passage. I moved to shut it, but even as my hand touched the ancient latch, a strange sensation stole over me. It was as though another will took control of my own and drew me forward into that passage. Like a sleepwalker I found myself traversing the sixty steps, then emerging at the door again.

There I halted, staring. The scene before me was changed. No longer was the fountain a ruined ornament; it was a huge cromlech now, formed of two mighty slabs of stone resting horizontally, one upon the other. The statues were all restored, and in the moonlight their features were clear and sharp in detail. At my side the manor house wall was smooth and even, without trace of ivy or lichen, and beyond, the aisle of corbie columns seemed to have doubled its length, with the stone birds all on their perches. The weeds and underbrush too had given

away to a smooth expanse of short cropped sward. Somewhere, rising and falling on the wind, the deep pealing of a bell reached my ears.

But the lure, the strange spell I had experienced on passing through the door still remained. Like a mental cloud, it blanketed all emotions save one, and that was the irresistible desire to move toward its source, which now seemed to emanate from the center of the aisle of columns. I paced forward, a step at a time, crossed the wide lawn. Black and curiously repelling in the moonlight, the stone corbies faced each other from their high mounts, their wings outspread, their beaks open, their eyes fixed on me. I had reached approximately the center of that aisle when abruptly I halted, aware in an uncertain way that I was being followed.

A shapeless mass of darker shadows swam into my vision then. The shadows resolved themselves into a procession of cowled figures moving slowly across the grounds toward me. Like a funeral cortege, with measured step, they advanced, and as they drew nearer it seemed that a man and woman were in the lead. All was vague and indistinct like a scene viewed through water, yet I saw the man was bearded with a stern countenance and that he wore a brocaded jerkin over which was thrown a slashed tunic, girded at the waist by a jeweled belt from which hung a dagger. There were ruffles at his wrists, and his waistfront was ornamented with Spanish blackwork. The woman I could see even less distinctly, but her head was bowed low, and she wore a gable headdress, the lappet of which was edged with gold. There was something familiar about the woman, perhaps her hair which was copper-colored like Debora's.

Past me, without notice of my presence, the procession moved. That strange lure was almost overwhelming now, drawing me after them. We emerged from the corbie aisle, crossed a second expanse of sward, and began to climb a low rise, following a vague path. We entered a wood, swathed in gloom where the huge oak trees seemed to arrange themselves in corridors and galleries. I heard the bell again, and it was much nearer, coming apparently from a point just ahead. Abruptly the trees fell away into a circular glade. In the center was a large flat stone, the top and sides of which were covered with dark stains.

And now the cowled figures grouped themselves in a circle and began to sway gently from side to side until the entire throng was writhing in a fantastic dance. The scene seemed to shift and waver, now clear in detail, now blurred and shadowy like a negative seen alternately through bright and dim light. The man in the jerkin dragged the woman forward, prostrated himself before the stone and began to mumble an incantation. His voice was deep-pitched and resonant, yet it seemed to reach my ears from far off, as if it had crossed vast leagues of space.

ON and on his voice droned. The cowled figures took up the litany, and the chanting rose louder and louder. All this time I had stood there, transfixed. Now as through the dimness I saw the man thrust the woman into an oval of moonlight and jerk the dagger from his belt I sought to cry out and lunge forward. But my feet were dead things, anchored to the earth, and my throat seemed constricted.

A saffron-colored light appeared over the top surface of the stone. It coalesced slowly, leaving a film of radiance like a gauze curtain hanging there stationary. An instant later behind that film a squat bestial *Thing* crouched, leering down at the assembled throng. Like a multiple-headed gigantic toad, its cavernous mouths opened and closed, its lidless eyes reflecting all the evil that has confronted man from primordial times. As I gazed upon that abysmal entity evoked by that unholy incantation, stark horror seared deep into my soul.

The moonlight fell away and a great dark cloud blackened the heavens. Then the wind and the rain were upon me. Lightning flashes alternately etched the glade in blinding brilliance and pitch darkness.

By the light of those flashes I saw the man in the jerkin throw up his arms toward the thing on the stone in supplication. Grasping the woman by the hair, he plunged the dagger into her throat. The blood gouted outwards as she reeled back and crumpled to the ground. All was vague and uncertain in the intermittent light, possessing a nightmarish quality of unreality—all save the

monstrous toad-like *Thing* which crouched on the stone slab. It slid down from the stone, groveled toward the woman, opening its multiple mouths.

Then the spell that held me was broken, and I turned and ran. I ran through the woods, down the aisle of corbie columns, black horror engulfing me. Not until I reached the fountain did I draw up, heart pounding, gasping for breath.

Oblivious to the torrents of rain I stood there in a kind of stupor, clutching the ancient stonework for support. As my heart slowly quieted, a hundred unanswerable questions crowded down upon me.

I turned to head for the house. But at that instant over the rolling of the thunder, a sharp pistol-like report sounded high above. A terrific weight descended upon my skull, and I felt myself going down into unconsciousness.

WHEN I opened my eyes, I was lying in bed, and Debora was bathing my wrists and brow with a wet cloth. Sunlight streamed through the Gothic windows.

"What happened?" I said, conscious of a dull ache in the back of my head.

She gave me a reassuring smile. "Nothing that won't mend, Robert, thank heaven. One of the oak-tree branches broke off during the storm and fell on you. Luckily my window was open, and I heard you cry out. But what were you doing on the grounds at that hour?"

All the horror of the preceding night came welling back to me, and for a moment I lay there without reply. Then, convincingly as I could, I explained that I had gone out to investigate an unusual sound, hoping that the matter would end there.

The matter didn't end there, however. By noon I felt sufficiently recovered to leave my bed, and, still a little shaky, continued the survey of my new possessions. I went down the wide, dark halls, examining carefully each room and anteroom, cataloguing in a little notebook each outstanding piece of furniture and exceptional piece of bric-a-brac that took my fancy, estimating their value and guessing at their age and origin. In this fashion I came upon a narrow rectangular room, opening off a short corridor which I somehow had overlooked, and entering it I saw at once that my inheritance was far richer than I had supposed it to be. The walls of this room were almost covered with large portraits in oil, each of which was the work of a master and worth a fabulous amount. There were several Memlings, Ghirlandaios, Carpaccios, a Raphael which might or might not have been authentic, and one or two Holbeins.

It was before a larger portrait that I stopped to stare with an incredulous eye. The nameplate read: *Portrait of Sir Edward Corbie, First Baronet Langham.* I had known, of course, that the line of the family originally owning the manor had been named Corbie, or as it was variously spelled, Corbee or Corbey. But what so disturbed me was this: Beyond a shadow of a doubt the figure in the painting was the man in the jerkin I had followed into the glade the night before.

Late that afternoon I went out into the grounds and saw the tree branch that had fallen upon me. It was a gnarled, massive length of wood, and the wonder was I hadn't been killed. High above, the splintered end showed where it had been twisted from the tree. I moved past the old fountain until I found myself once again before the corbie door. But the door was a dull, prosaic thing in the light of day. Even the mistletoe and the corbies carved upon it seemed unimaginatively crude. Nor did the passage reveal anything more.

Yet, curiously, an idle thought persisted in my mind. As a child I had accompanied my father on several occasions to an amusement park near Tilborn, and I recall how the tram car stopped just above a large culvert and the passengers all walked down a flight of steps to enter the park through the culvert archway. From the window of the car I could see the sea, the shore and the bright, painted buildings. Then, after descending the stairs, I saw that same scene as I passed through the archway. But, childlike, I never would believe that it was the *same* scene. I was sure there were two seashores, and two amusement parks, one above and one below, and for me the upper one began to take on a kind of magical quality all its own.

Could I apply the same reasoning here? Could there be two manor grounds, one per-

haps in a different plane, and did that corbie door stand as an entrance between them?

THAT evening Dennison Eldridge called again. He carried a small camera and several flash bulbs, and he asked to see the library "first," apparently assuming I had given my consent to his inspection of the entire house.

He took several pictures of the library, then moved across to the book shelves and ran his eye up and down the titles. But apparently he didn't find what he was looking for, for after a moment he turned to me.

"I happen to know your Uncle Charles never used this room," he said. "Avoided it like the plague. He threw out some of the books, too."

"They're not a very cheerful lot," I agreed.

Eldridge tamped tobacco in his pipe and lit it slowly. "Most of the books he cast out were destroyed," he said. "But a number of them found their way into the village, and I was lucky enough to get my hands on one of them for a short time. The rest of them are . . . unobtainable." He puffed in silence a moment, then crossed to a chair and slumped into it.

"Let me give you a little history of this house as I have pieced it together," he said. A glitter had entered his eyes now, and his hands trembled perceptibly. "It begins as far as I can determine in the year 1507 at the close of the reign of Henry VII. Edward Corbie had fought at Bosworth Field, supporting Richard III. Upon Richard's death, Corbie moved here to Langham and threw his will and fortune into the building of the manor to honor his marriage to Elizabeth Beaufort, who, ironically enough, was a direct descendent of John of Gaunt.

"According to the more or less muddled chronicles which have come down, Elizabeth pleaded with her husband not to build on this site. There was something about the grove of oak trees that oppressed her. Corbie, however, laughed at her fears and went ahead with the construction, even sending to France for some of the stained glass windows.

"In 1507 a visitor to the manor, after dining alone with Corbie, asked to see his wife. The Master, who was quite drunk at the time, led his guest to a stone crypt in the park and opened a door carved with the likeness of two corbies. Inside the guest beheld a hideous sight.

"There was the woman, Elizabeth, propped up in a chair, her body enveloped in a heavy cloak, her face hidden by her long undone hair. But the wind from the open door blew the hair to one side to reveal the putrefaction of death, and the cloak dropped down from the left breast, showing a horrible wound where the heart had been literally torn from the body.

"From there on, the account becomes vague. One part has it that Edward Corbie was taken to Newgate Prison where he died shortly. Another declares 'that it was recognized his soul was taken over by devils,' and that he was 'left alone with his own knowledge of evil and self torment.' Anyway, it isn't a pleasant tale."

"No," I replied, "it isn't. But neither is it worse than the background of a great many houses I'm familiar with. Practically no historical landmark in England is complete without at least one or more ghosts of the past."

All the same I felt the cloud of foreboding thicken about me.

Eldridge shrugged. "I've told you only the beginning, the initial crime," he said. "The rest you can dig up for yourself, if you have better luck than I."

He took his leave a short time later. At the door, however, he hesitated.

"I spoke of a crypt with an oddly designed door," he said, "supposedly in the grounds somewhere. The thing's probably long since been destroyed, but if it isn't, I should . . . well, I should avoid it if I were you."

THE blow on the head had taken more of my strength than I realized, and I decided to retire early. Climbing up the grand staircase to our second floor bedroom, I counted the rungs of the balustrade as is my custom, but halfway to the top, lost count, and had to go down and start over again. Again I lay awake for hours, tossing restlessly. The corbie door persisted in my thoughts; it seemed to lure me with all the drawing power of a lodestone. What I

wondered, did Eldridge know about that door that he had seen fit to warn me away from it. And what was in those books my uncle had thrown out of his library?

I fell asleep at length but awoke at a quarter of two. The bed at my side was empty; Debora was gone! For several moments I lay there, listening. Then I got up, opened the door and went out into the corridor. A single orchid-shaded night-light burned at the far end, partially illuminating the grand staircase. At the top of the stairs, leaning lightly against the top post of the balustrade, stood a woman, her back turned toward me. But as I looked, I saw that it was not Debora. She had copper-colored hair, the same as my wife's, and she was of the same height with the same general contours of figure. But it was not Debora! I knew this as a man knows a familiar object in the dark. In utter silence she stood there, as if waiting for something. Then, even as I took a step forward, she began to descend.

She had reached a point halfway down when I gained the head of the stairs. And then a strange thing happened. The woman seemed to fade away into nothingness. One moment she was there; the next, she had disappeared utterly. Yet as I stood there, a great inward chill swept up my spine. For in the dust which still lay thick on the steps I could see her footprints continue to descend, one after another!

Control left me then. I uttered a cry and ran down to the library. It was empty. I burst through the connecting doorway into the assembly chamber. Five feet away Debora, a lavender-colored robe over her nightdress, drew up short with a startled exclamation.

"Why, Robert," she said, "what's wrong?"

"What are you doing here?" I demanded.

She laughed. "You forgot to latch the garden door. It was banging in the wind, and I went down to fasten it, that's all."

"And you weren't on the staircase a moment ago?" I persisted. My pulse was still racing from what I had seen.

She laughed again. "Of course I was. I came directly down here. Come, Robert, go to bed. You're not awake yet."

Early next morning, immediately after breakfast, I slipped on an old sweater for the weather had turned suddenly cold, and set out for Langham. Without a plan but with a strong curiosity prompted by Eldridge's reference to "books still in the village," I headed down the old lane, facing a strong southwest wind. For the first time I had opportunity to examine the surrounding countryside, and I confess it impressed me anything but favorably. The road itself was a twisting strip of mire and jagged holes; bridges were rotting and sadly in need of repair; and the heath that stretched away on all sides waved its grasses in a way that resembled the slow undulations of a forlorn sea.

The few cottages and houses that were visible from the road were tumble-down affairs, many of them without paint, most of them with their hedging gone rank and untrimmed. One thing struck me as rather odd. None of them had windows opening to the north; that is in the direction of the manor. But then of course the winds must be bitter sweeping across this open expanse during the cold months.

ARRIVING in the village, I chose the pub as a likely initial source of information. At that hour the place was deserted, save for one man talking with the tavernkeeper. He was a red-faced man with a toothbrush mustache who eyed me suspiciously when I offered a few idle comments on the weather. But when, by way of introduction, I swung the conversation around to the manor, he suddenly placed his glass of ale down on the counter and faced me deliberately.

"You'll be the new master of Corbie House," he said.

I nodded. "Perhaps you can help me," I said. "I understand a number of books from the manor library have found their way into the village. Do you know who has them?"

The man shook his head violently. "I know nothing at all about Corbie House," he said. "Nothing at all. With hands that trembled, he fumbled for a coin, flung it on the bar and hurried out.

Unfriendly fellow, I thought. Evidently the manor, standing as the mark of ancient overlordship, was still the object of some

resentment here. But an hour later I was more puzzled than I cared to admit.

Though I had spoken to a dozen villagers and though in most cases I had been politely received, the moment I mentioned the manor or the books which were the object of my search, conversation came to a sudden embarrassing halt. Now, as I passed down the street, I was aware of eyes turned furtively in my direction, of groups gathering in doorways to whisper audibly after I had gone. I was a stranger, of course, and the attitude may have been the usual one accorded newcomers who sought to pry into what were deemed private affairs. But somehow I could not accept that reasoning.

I came to the vicarage at length and found the vicar in; a rather youngish man with a skull quite bald and kindly yet penetrating eyes. We smoked our pipes together with some of his strong shag-cut tobacco, chatting pleasantly. Abruptly I came to the point.

"What is wrong with Corbie House?" I asked.

He looked at me in silence. If my question startled him, his face didn't reveal it. "Wrong?" he repeated at length.

"Yes," I said, "wrong. I've been trying to locate several volumes which I understand contain a history, or partial history, of the manor and which I have reason to believe are somewhere in Langham. But I may as well have been asking for the moon for all the response I've got. Is the past of the manor so unpleasant then that . . .?"

"Pleasantness is hardly a quality which enters into it," the vicar said. He seemed fighting two emotions, a simultaneous desire and reluctance to talk. His gray eyes winked nervously several times, and, laying down his pipe, he ran his left hand over his smooth pate.

"I have the books you mentioned," he said. "There are two of them and a part of a third. They came to me as part of the possessions of my predecessor, and they were placed in his hands by your Uncle Charles when he first took possession of the manor. I might say that a Mr. Dennison Eldridge who lives in the village has on several occasions requested permission to see them, but of course I refused."

"Why?" I demanded. In the cheerless house that this was, the cloud of foreboding was slowly returning to gather about me.

THE vicar shifted in his chair uneasily. "Your Uncle Charles left certain implicit instructions concerning their removal," he said. "It seems that two of the books are identical. One of them is to be retained here in this house; the other is to be turned over to the new master of the manor upon his request. When read, they are to be read at the same hour, separately. That is, as I understand it, we are to agree on a certain time, and I am then to read one copy here, and presumably you the other at Corbie House. Your Uncle Charles was very emphatic about this."

"But why?" I said again.

He shook his head. "I don't know. The books have been packed away in two boxes —they're in my garret—and I have never seen fit to disregard the instructions. I would suggest, however, that you deliberate the matter carefully before. . . ."

"No," I interrupted stubbornly. "I want them now." All this vague talk about secret books was beginning to irritate me and at the same time arouse in me a mounting sense of unease.

The vicar left the room. I heard him mounting the stairs and a moment later the sounds of fumbling about overhead. He returned presently, carrying two small flat boxes made of wood and equipped with staples and padlocks. One of them, slightly larger, bore a penciled cross on its cover.

"This is the box that is to remain with me," the vicar said, and his voice sounded strained. "It apparently contains the uncompleted book as well as the duplicate in your box. I shall read this or not according to your wishes. Now for the time element. Shall we say two hours from now? That will give you ample time to return to the manor."

I agreed hastily, and I also told him he had my permission to read the uncompleted book. At the door the vicar seized my hand and shook it heavily.

"I don't suppose you would reconsider," he said. "I don't suppose you would, as the saying goes, let sleeping dogs lie?"

But I shook my head, and after thanking

him, set off rapidly. The return to the manor seemed endless, but I found the vicar's time estimate to be accurate, for the clock was just striking as I entered the door. I found then that the vicar had forgotten to give me a key, and I was forced to wait, fuming with impatience, while the manservant located an iron bar stout enough to force the hasp.

Inside was a comparatively small book bound with covers, waxed oak wood, with iron hinges but without a title. It was a curious volume. Some of the pages were hand-printed, with the margins ornate with colored designs and what appeared to be cabalistic symbols. Other pages had been carefully written in a fine spidery hand; while the last section was blurred and almost undecipherable, as if it had been immersed in water.

Opening a page at random, my eyes fastened on a passage which I read several times:

> ". . . the crypt stoode not far from the house on a little knoll and was surrounded by seven mightie oak trees. It was built of stone and opened by a strange and unusual door, bearing the likeness of corbies, framed by sprigs of mistletoe, and having in the center the design of a death's head."

FOR an hour I read, a powerful magnifying glass aiding me. At the end of that time I sat back with a low exclamation. The history of the Corbie family was a black one, and doom seemed to have stalked the female line down through the generations.

In 1548 Rupert Corbie was credited with having murdered his own daughter. Here again there was mention of the door of the crypt, "where the girl had been properly entombed, only to have her body disappear three days later."

Mary, wife of James Corbie, was found dead in bed when her husband returned from a hunting party with Charles I. Her skull was crushed, and the mark of a cloven hoof was said to be upon her brow.

Lenoire Corbie alone had outlived her husband, but her death in 1714 was surrounded by mysterious circumstances. Accused of being slightly mad, she was accustomed to walk at night in the manor grounds. The crypt at that time had long since been destroyed; only the door remained, standing alone and forlorn in the midst of the oak trees. On the night of her death the villagers in Langham reported a strange light in the sky in the direction of the manor park, and one peasant ran breathless into the town to tell of a procession of cowled figures marching through the wood. Lenoire Corbie was found sprawled before the crypt door, hand outstretched, as if her last dying movement had been to thrust it open, though this action was incomprehensible, for as the writer said, "she could have simply walked around it."

The last section of the book seemed to have been written by another person, perhaps at an earlier date, and was in such bad condition that I could decipher none of it. All in all, it was a strange volume, but hardly one, I thought, that necessitated a simultaneous reading by two persons.

And then I turned to the last page. Printed here in curious stilted letters in a solution that looked more like blood than ink, was the inscription:

> *Pass not the portals of the door with the corbies, or heaven help ye, ye shall lose thy soul!*

The rest of the day was one of misery for me. For one thing, the wound on my head was not healing the way it should, and I regretted not visiting the local physician while I was in Langham. It felt feverish with the sensation of a pulse in it, and in a vague way it seemed to be effecting my vision. A wind-swept rain came up again in late afternoon, confining me to the house, and the view of the lowering sky through the library windows was a depressing one. But most significant of all was the lure of the corbie door. Whether or not it was a psychological paradox, the result of the many warnings I had received or read, I did not know, but the door remained in my mind's eye constantly. It drew me, it attracted me until I felt I would go mad if I could not pass through it again.

That night after Debora had retired I sat again in the library. I read for a while,

but time dragged past. Then about midnight a low sobbing reached my ears. I went to the door and listened. The rain had passed on and the sky was clear, but water still murmured in the roof's runnels. The wind blew from the southwest, and it carried the sound with it. There was something unearthly about that sobbing; the owner of the voice seemed in deepest despair, and I felt a slow chill sweep over me.

In the grounds I headed straight for the corbie door, found it open as I had told myself it would be. I entered the black passage and completed the circle.

Again I found myself in a borderland world!

The night was a repetition of the night before. Once more I saw that silent procession of cowled figures and drawn by that strange lure, I followed them into the glade. A man and a woman in mid-seventeenth century dress were in the lead. Again all was vague and shadowy, but the woman was the same tall, full-bosomed woman with copper-colored hair and hazel eyes so strangely like Debora.

The fantastic dance, the horrible rites followed like a cinema film which has been run a second time. The man drew forth a knife, and hideous and nauseating, the beast that was not a beast took form on the slab. Through the dimness I watched it rear its evil head, waiting for that moment when the knife would strike. The woman screamed and fell.

And then a sea of darkness washed over me, blotting out the scene. There was a sensation of reeling earth and a great roaring, and then somehow I was stumbling out of the black woods toward the manor.

AT TEN o'clock next morning Dennison Eldridge was ushered by the woman servant into the library. He was hatless, and his face was drawn and haggard. He threw a question at me before I had a chance to speak.

"Did you see the vicar yesterday?" he demanded.

"Why, yes," I replied, "I did. But . . ."

"And did you make arrangements with him to open those books that once belonged to your Uncle Charles? The books, two copies of which were supposed to be read at the same time?"

"I don't quite see what business it is . . ."

"Did you?" he persisted.

I nodded, staring at him in perplexity.

Eldridge lowered himself into a chair with a low moan. "God forgive me," he said. "I should have warned you."

I was conscious of a growing uneasiness as I waited for him to explain.

"The vicar," Eldridge said at length, "was found unconscious on the floor of his study. In his fireplace were the charred remnants of printed pages. Oh, he wasn't harmed physically," he went on. "He couldn't be, you know. But his mind . . ." Eldridge spread his hands, and his eyelids drooped wearily, "his mind is completely gone."

"But why. . . .?" I said.

"The Langham doctor said he might recover in a long time. He also said the vicar was suffering from a severe mental shock. Probably that's nearer the truth than he imagined. We shall never know what was in that second book. . . . But you, sir, couldn't you close up this place and move back to London? Couldn't you?"

SIX days passed. They were days of horror, of bewilderment, of fear for my sanity. Thus far, thank heaven, I had been able to keep the truth from Debora, though I was sure she was beginning to suspect something was wrong. But my life in the manor had centered down to anticipation during the daylight hours—anticipation for the unknown—and mental struggle each night to fight off the lure of the corbie door.

Six times I had entered the passage opened by that door, traversed the sixty steps, and found myself in a borderland world. The first and second night I took this action to investigate a woman's cry I thought I had heard. But after that I was drawn by a psychic power. It was as if a lorelei lurked beyond that door, calling out to me in a command that would not be denied.

Six times I have followed a man and a woman with copper-colored hair strangely resembling Debora into the glade in the wood. The vision was always the same.

First the writhing dance of the cowled figures, then the incantation, then the materialization of the beast-Thing on the stone slab, and finally, hideous and terrifying, the sacrifice.

The stark horror lay in the fact that I knew in advance each detail that was going to happen and that I was powerless to prevent it.

In the light of these developments, I phoned the mason in Langham, asking him to come to the manor immediately. If I could not resist the lure of the corbie door by strength of will alone, I meant to seal its entrance forever. But the man was vague in his replies, promising only that he would "do what he could."

The day of the twenty-eighth of June was a day of somber skies and humid heat. At six o'clock Debora and I ate our evening meal, and I called her attention again to the button on my waistcoat which once more had turned blue in color.

"I see nothing wrong with it, Robert," she said with her maddening insistence. Then she added inanely, "Are you feeling quite well?"

At seven o'clock I began to feel the attraction of the corbie door, and I phoned the Langham mason again. But although I let the instrument ring repeatedly, there was no answer. By eight the strange lure was upon me like a mental cloud. I climbed the grand staircase and entered a room on the south side of the third floor. This room I had discovered was fitted with three large windows in the form of an alcove. By looking diagonally out of the middle window I found I could obtain a clear and unobstructed view of the corbie door. I remained there an hour in utter darkness, staring down at the vague rectangular shape of the door. Nameless terror was slowly closing in on me.

Shortly after eleven Debora laid aside her needlework and went to her room. Ten minutes later found me in the library pacing back and forth restlessly before the book-lined walls. An expectant hush had settled over the manor.

Midnight came and passed, and the great house lay steeped in silence. I slumped into a chair and began to reason with myself. Tomorrow the masons would surely be here, and the door and the passage would be walled up forever. Could I go on after that, always wondering whether I actually had seen those visions or whether they were some quirk of my imagination? Did I dare trust my sanity in future months, always with the knowledge that I had been on the brink of the unknown? Stay away, an inner voice told me, avoid that door like the plague. It was Eldridge's voice as I remembered his warning of a few nights before.

For an hour I sat there, brain in a turmoil, my palms moist with cold perspiration. Then at one o'clock I got up and strode deliberately into the grounds. Once more, I told myself feverishly; just once more . . .

I AM back. I have returned to the library from my last and final vision. But vision it is no longer. This time, God help me, I have taken an active part in the tragedy. This time. . . .

It is four in the morning. Even now the hideous details of all that happened are a blur in my memory. Were it not for this blood on my hands and this knife on the table I would swear it was all a dream.

I entered the passage, and I followed the sixty steps to the door again. There in the moonlight I looked upon the statues that were all restored and the fountain that was a cromlech now. There I saw the procession of cowled figures and the woman with the copper-colored hair in the lead.

I followed, *but presently I became aware that it was I who strode at the woman's side, that it was I who grasped her wrist and drew her firmly down the aisle of columns.*

In my hands I felt now the haft of a long-bladed knife, and as we paced through the dark wood into the glade, an alien intellect invaded my own. I looked upon the woman without emotion. I felt only the overpowering desire to see the sacrifice completed, to evoke the beast-Thing, to plunge the knife deep into the woman's vitals.

Yet, though I moved like an automaton, far back in my mind, an awareness of the horror filtered out to me.

Detail for detail the events in the glade were repeated with myself in the role of inquisitor. Then at last the moment came,

and I drove the knife deep into her throat.

I had an instant's glance at my blood-smeared hands. Then with a scream of anguish I turned and ran. How I found my way back to the manor I don't know. I remember running wildly down the aisle of the columns, across the lawn and the flagstones and bursting through the library door. . . .

An hour has passed, and I am still slumped in the chair in that room. A great lassitude and weakness has swept over me, and I have made no attempt to answer the many questions that are seething through my mind. Inside the house I can hear the pendulum clock ticking slowly. Outside, a rising wind is howling around the gables and eaves. . . .

. . . the wind has just ripped one of the French windows from its hinges and broken it into a thousand fragments. The sound of the crash was tremendous and will bring Debora to this room in a moment.

But the manor is utterly still. There is no sound from Debora's room. No sound at all . . . and that is odd . . .

The July first issue of the *London Chronicle* carried the following small item at the bottom of its third page:

Reports of a dual tragedy have reached us today from Corbie House near Langham-on-Trell. The body of Mr. Robert Fielding was found by servants in the library of the house, following their awakening by the sound of a shot in the early morning hours. Mr. Fielding, who only recently inherited the estate, lay sprawled across a chair, still clutching the revolver with which he had taken his own life.

In the converted bedroom on the second floor the body of Mr. Fielding's wife, Debora, was also found. Her throat had been cruelly slashed with a large kitchen knife.

Yard officials as yet have been unable to supply a motive for the crime or to explain the trail of blood leading from the house to a glade in a nearby wood where the woman was undoubtedly killed.

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The Black Madonna

BY HAROLD LAWLOR

APPARENTLY I have committed the perfect crime. I can say the murder was justified, which it most assuredly was, if murder ever is; I can rationalize it as I will; but the fact remains that I have deliberately taken the life of a fellow man.

I think I know what *The Black Madonna* would say about it if she could speak; for, after a fashion, she *has* spoken.

The first time I ever heard of *The Black Madonna* was when Aunt Bea sent me that cryptic, somehow vaguely alarming note from her place, *La Casa Encantada,* in the northern part of the state.

"Paul, darling," (she wrote), "I'm about to die a violent death. *The Black Madonna* says so, and you know, of course, that she is never wrong. Could you run up here for a few days? And not a word to Etien about this when you arrive. Won't you please come, Paul? I'm frightened."

I hadn't seen Aunt Bea since her return from France, where she'd been trapped for years by the war, but as usual she took it for granted that I'd know just what she was talking about.

Naturally, I didn't.

What did she mean about dying a violent death? And what was *The Black Madonna?* And who in the hell, I wondered irritably, was Etien? Though about this last, at least, I entertained grave suspicions, knowing Aunt Bea so well as I did.

I have the Elsmobile agency in Santa Luisa, but business was slow due to the times, so I shut up shop immediately and drove north along the coast highway to find out what particular bat poor old Aunt Bea had in her belfry this time.

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

The painting was like a barometer—of life and death.

You are not to infer from this that she is insane, or even really old. On the contrary, she's a remarkably chic, youthful-appearing woman in her early fifties, and sane enough, I'm sure. But there's no use trying to evade the fact that she bears a distressing resemblance to the flutter-brained females Miss Billie Burke limns so accurately in the films.

But to know all is to forgive all, as someone has said. When she was a pretty, healthy, normal girl of eighteen she'd married the orphaned scion of an old and wealthy California family—a marriage that was surely made in Heaven. A year later a son had been born, and the little family was ecstatically happy for another two years, till the husband and child were drowned when their cruiser upset in a sudden squall. Drowned before Aunt Bea's anguished eyes. Grief-stricken, she collapsed, and was prostrated for many months.

All this happened a few years before I was born. I was told the story by my mother, whose younger sister Aunt Bea had been.

Poor Aunt Bea was never the same afterward. When, months later, she'd once again begun to move about the world, everyone saw that she'd escaped into a hazy Never-Never Land of her own, a Lethe where the sharp outlines of reality were eternally blurred. Perhaps it was as well, for she was happy in her new fashion. And those of us who loved her best, touched by pity, learned to forgive her her erratic impulses and faintly scandalous behavior.

For, immensely wealthy after her first husband's demise, she'd begun those moth-like flutterings from California to New York to Europe. And she'd collected her amazing series of husbands and antiques along the way, bringing them home in triumph at intervals to *La Casa Encantada*, her California estate.

The antiques she kept; the husbands, alas, were dismissed almost as rapidly as they'd been acquired.

SHE was having tea alone on the south terrace when I drove up that afternoon, after negotiating the hair-pin (and hair-raising) curves of the canyon and mountain roads leading to *La Casa Encantada*.

I braked the coupe to a stop, and slid from under the steering wheel to get out on the opposite side, forgetting for the moment that the inside handle of the door on that side was still broken. I rolled the window down, and opened the door from the outside.

"Hello, Aunt Bea!" I called.

She looked much the same, save for the fact that her beautifully dressed hair was now a strange and wondrous red. It had been blonde when last I saw her. But her manner was as sprightly as ever, and her greeting was characteristic.

"Paul, sweet! I *knew* you'd come to see me before I get hit by a truck, or fall off a cliff, or whatnot. Have a piece of toast, lover, that's a handsome tie." She patted my cheek and beamed at me. "Isn't the weather gorgeous? You look more like your mother every day."

I picked my way through all this verbiage and tried to hit the salient point. When I was sitting opposite her at the wrought-iron and glass terrace table, I said, "What's all this nonsense, now, about your dying a violent death?"

Her face clouded a little, and she put her teacup down. "Oh, Paul, I'm afraid it's really true. *The Black Madonna's* never wrong, so I got old Houcks up here and revised my will, with everything going to Etien—that is, during his lifetime. But really, lamb, it's to be held in trust for you, and he can't sell a single solitary thing, only enjoy the income, and when he dies, *you'll* get everything, but that'll be years and years from now, of course, because *he's* only twenty-six, just your age, and naturally *he* won't die—"

I held up a hand dizzily. "Aunt Bea, please. Suppose you tell me first who Etien is?"

She stared at me, aghast. "Paul, lover, surely you know? Etien's my *new* husband."

"Aunt Bea!" I groaned. "Not again? You haven't acquired a seventh—"

"Sixth, darling," corrected Aunt Bea, a reasonable woman. "After all, I married that redheaded one twice—you know, the one who used to throw gin bottles at poor Hawkins, what was his name again, Bruce, yes—so, you see, *he* only counts *once*." She beamed at me, and went on. "Etien's a

dear boy, and he didn't care a hoot about my money, but was madly in love with me and threatening suicide if I didn't marry him—besides, he had *such* a pretty name, De Marsigny—so naturally I *had* to marry him. So you see, dear? It really was a *very* reasonable marriage *this* time, now wasn't it, so don't scold, dear."

She looked at me anxiously, pathetically eager for my approval. What was the use? I said gently, "Of course, Aunt Bea, very reasonable. And I know you'll be very happy."

But I was afraid I could picture Etien de Marsigny already. A handsome gigolo. A slimy serpent with hooded eyes and a furtive manner. I sighed inwardly. Poor Aunt Bea.

But that would have to wait till later. To get back to this other thing. "You mentioned something called *The Black Madonna?*" I prompted her. "You said she told you—"

"Well, she didn't *tell* me, exactly," Aunt Bea said. "You see, she isn't— But come, I'll show you."

She stood up, slender as a girl, slipped her arm companionably through mine, and led me down the terrace to the French doors opening into the little morning room. On one wall there was a *toile de jouy* slip-covered sofa, on which we seated ourselves, set in a recess flanked on either side by floor-to-ceiling bookshelves.

And on the opposite wall, above a Louis XV mantel of Caen stone, was *The Black Madonna.*

IT WAS a painting. An oil painting of the Virgin and Child, like many another in pose, but with one rather astonishing difference.

Instead of being portrayed conventionally as a white woman, the Madonna was black as ebony. I had never seen such a thing before.

"Why—why, she's *black,*" I exclaimed to Aunt Bea, sitting beside me on the sofa.

"Yes. There's a rather interesting story about it. The dealer gave me a leaflet when I bought it."

She went to an ormolu-mounted desk and rummaged in one of the untidy drawers. It was while she was doing this that I made another interesting discovery about the painting.

On the left cheek of the Madonna—the nearest cheek as you viewed the picture—there was a small crescent-shaped scar. And as I looked at the painting, the scar seemed to glisten moistly as the light struck it. Curious to see how the artist had gained his effect, I walked over and touched a tentative forefinger to the scar.

My finger came away wet. Wetly red. Quite as if—as if the scar were actually *bleeding!*

Aunt Bea came and stood beside me while I stared down at the wet red smear on my forefinger.

"So you've discovered it already?" she said, smiling faintly at my look of stupefaction. "That the scar is bleeding?"

"But what does it mean?" I asked.

Before she could answer there was the sound of a car on the graveled drive, and masculine voices, raised in banter, floated through the open windows behind us.

Bea placed the leaflet she held in my hand.

"Sh!" she said. "There's Etien. He's been playing golf with friends. I can't stop to explain now. He—he doesn't like me to talk to anyone about *The Black Madonna.* Don't linger now. Read the story of the painting up in your room. You can meet Etien at dinner."

She seemed absurdly agitated, for so little reason. She all but dragged me from the room. I let her lead me to the hall, but I went alone up the fantastically grand marble staircase to the suite I always occupied during my rare visits to Aunt Bea.

Everything was just the same. Only Minnie, my aunt's personal maid for many years, was changed, and looked much older since I'd seen her last. She passed me in the upper hall, her arms laden with towels. She nearly dropped them when she saw me.

"Oh, Mr. Paul. I'm so glad you're here!" she cried softly. "I've been so upset. Miss Bea is fretting about something."

"I know, Minnie. How long has it been going on?"

"Just for the last few days," Minnie whispered. "She's been quarreling with—him."

I supposed she meant Etien. I patted her thin shoulder absently. "I'm sure everything will turn out all right."

I left her then and went into my room. There I threw myself down on the bed, and read the leaflet that Aunt Bea had given me. It was printed in French and English, and I knew just enough French to make out that it was the same story told in both languages.

The highly improbable (or so I deemed it) story of *The Black Madonna.*

Briefly the history of the painting was this: In the fourteenth or fifteenth century, the archbishop of the Coptic Cathedral at Cairo commissioned a celebrated Moorish artist of the time to execute a painting of the Madonna for the church.

No further instructions being given him, the artist, a simple unworldly man for all his talent, chose as a model a girl of his own race. There was consternation among the church fathers when the painting was done and they saw that the Madonna was black.

No little argument ensued, but since the painting, though unconventional in treatment, was of superior quality, the artist was paid his fee, and the picture hung in the Cathedral.

During the centuries that followed, the Coptic Church endured many persecutions. The Cathedral itself was pillaged again and again, and each time the painting of *The Black Madonna* was stolen, though ultimately, in each instance, being retrieved and re-hung in the church.

On the first such occasion that the painting was recovered, it was seen that one of the vandals who'd stolen it must have used it for a target, perhaps in drunken sport. For the painted cheek of the Madonna had been scarred by a sabre-thrust.

It was really then that the weird aspect of its history began. For it began to be noticed that archbishop after archbishop, titular owners of the painting, were meeting violent deaths without exception. And in every case, before they died, their deaths were presaged by the bleeding of the scar on the cheek of the Madonna.

Eventually, in terror or superstitious awe, the painting was sold, winding up after many, many years in the hands of the Parisian art-dealer from whom Aunt Bea had bought it.

Well, I folded the leaflet thoughtfully. It was a romantic story. Too romantic, I thought, to be quite credible. But it set my mind at rest on one point. It was only too evident what had happened.

Aunt Bea was nothing if not the impressionable type. She'd read this highly-embroidered account of the painting, and her imagination had done the rest. She was, she thought, about to die a violent death like those archbishops of old.

I remember smiling a little at her credulity. The "bleeding" of the scar, in all probability, was caused by some action of heat or humidity upon the pigment. I'd hang around for a few more days, until Aunt Bea saw for herself that nothing was going to happen. Then I could go back in peace to Santa Luisa with nothing more disturbing on my mind than John L. Lewis and the OPA.

I SHAVED and showered and went down to dinner. It was as I had feared.

Etien de Marsigny was exactly as I had pictured him. I guess women would consider him handsome, and perhaps he was. But I can spot a phony a mile off. I considered it a compliment that he didn't like me any better than I liked him, though we hid our mutual animosity as well as we could and were civil enough to each other —on my part, for Aunt Bea's sake.

She seemed to notice nothing amiss, but rattled on in her usual fanciful style. Fortunately she rarely waited for a reply, so that I was able to listen with half my attention and concentrate on studying Etien.

If he'd married Aunt Bea only for her money, as he surely had or I was no judge, already he was repenting his bargain. That is, if his behavior at dinner were any criterion.

He sat in sullen silence throughout the meal, his handsome chin sunk on his chest, and played idly with the wine-glass before him. Occasionally, at one of Aunt Bea's wilder conversational flights, he raised his head to cock a superior eyebrow at me.

The hand on my lap under the table tightened into a fist, but I kept my mouth shut, and blandly ignored his gaze. Trouble

was brewing—it was thick in the air as fog—but I never suspected the form it was to take.

Etien excused himself right after dinner, pleading tiredness from the afternoon's golf, and went to his room. Aunt Bea and I soon followed him upstairs.

IN THE upper hall, just before we separated, she said, lucidly for her, "I'm so glad you came, Paul. I—I feel safer now."

I don't like to remember that.

Minnie's cries, and the commotion she raised banging on my door, awoke me at six the next morning. It took me a minute to orient myself, then I hustled into a robe and opened the door to find her standing agitatedly outside, tears streaming down her withered old face.

"Oh, Mr. Paul! Oh, Mr. Paul!" She clung to me, sobbing. "At the foot of the stairs! Miss Bea!"

I put her aside gently, and raced down the bronze-railed marble stairway. Behind me, Minnie came more slowly, her hand on the rail and mindful of her footing. And from somewhere up above, I could hear Etien's sleepy voice asking, "What's the matter?"

It didn't occur to me at all to think it strange that Minnie had called me instead of Etien.

Aunt Bea's body, clad in a chartreuse robe, lay on the marble floor at the foot of the stairs. Her tinted hair had come unfastened and poured like a stream of blood over her shoulders. Her head was bent at such a terribly unnatural angle I knew even without examining her more closely that she was dead.

Strangely, even at that first moment of awful shock, I could only think sadly that she might have met a kindlier fate. For life had dealt her so many blows, and she'd always met them with such sprightly gallantry. Death might have come peacefully instead of like a vandal in the night.

I did my best to comfort poor heartbroken old Minnie. "Sh, Minnie, don't cry. What's there to cry for? She's happy now, at last. She's with Steve and Billy."

And Minnie sobbed softly against my shoulder. "I know, I know, Mr. Paul." But she couldn't stop the tears.

Etien, in robe and pajamas, came hurtling down the steps behind us.

"Good God!" he cried, his eyes on Aunt Bea's still figure. "I heard her sometime during the night, but I was only half-awake. She couldn't sleep, she said, and was going downstairs for a book. She must have tripped."

But I saw his dark glance go immediately about the great hall and its furnishings, and it said as plainly as words, "Everything is mine now."

Minnie saw it too, I know, for her sobs caught angrily. As for myself, I was too saddened at the moment to resent Etien. But neither of us took his protestations of grief too seriously.

It was while we were waiting for the doctor and undertaker to come that I did a curious thing—curious, considering my earlier skepticism.

I don't know what impelled me, but when Etien had gone upstairs to dress, and Minnie had disappeared to get things in readiness for the mortician, I went into the little morning room where the painting hung. And I touched it gingerly—in curiosity at first, then with mounting surprise.

I hadn't been mistaken at first glance.

The scar on the cheek of *The Black Madonna* was now quite dry.

It was passing strange. Considering the tragedy that had just occurred, one might almost believe the legend of the painting were true.

ETIEN invited me, not too cordially, to stay on until after the funeral. I can't say I was particularly grateful for his invitation for he could hardly do anything else.

Minnie was going to live with a married daughter in Glendale. "I couldn't work for anybody else," she told me simply, and I was touched.

On the morning after the funeral, the day Minnie was to leave, she came to my room. And I knew there was something on her mind from the very way she opened my door the merest slit and sort of slithered through the narrow opening in conspiratorial fashion.

She didn't leave me long in doubt. She did have something to tell me. And it was about Aunt Bea.

"Mr. Paul," she whispered. "Have you ever wondered if maybe Miss Bea's death was not accidental?"

"What!" Such a thought had never crossed my mind. "What do you mean?"

"I don't think she fell down those stairs," Minnie said. "I think she was *pushed.*"

"Pushed! But Minnie, who—?"

"*Him.*" She jerked her head in the general direction of Etien's room.

I frowned. Minnie was old, and old people sometimes get wrong ideas to which they cling tenaciously. I said, "That's a very serious accusation to make—unless you have some proof."

"Proof!" Minnie sniffed. "No, I haven't. But I *know,* just the same. Here." She touched her heart. "Listen, did Miss Bea ever tell you the story of *The Black Madonna?*"

"She gave me a leaflet about it," I admitted.

"Then you know it always forewarns the violent death of the owner?"

"But, Minnie, surely that's just superstition," I said. "A colorful yarn made up to enhance its value."

"That's not the point," Minnie said stubbornly. "The thing is, whether it foretells violent death accurately or not, the scar *does* bleed. And *some* people believed the story. And I know that he—that Etien fellow—had been fighting with Miss Bea about it for days. He wanted her to sell the painting, and he was just raving mad because she wouldn't."

Minnie clutched my arm. "You know what? I think he'd been planning to kill Miss Bea, and he was afraid that picture would give him away before he could do it.

"Afraid that Miss Bea would guess he was meaning to kill her when she saw the Madonna bleeding!"

It made me wonder. Aunt Bea certainly hadn't wanted Etien to know that she'd told me the legend of the Madonna, which seemed to confirm Minnie's story of their earlier quarrels. And I could think of no possible other reason why Etien should have urged her so vehemently to get rid of the painting.

I said slowly, "But Minnie, even if you're right, and Etien did kill Aunt Bea, there isn't any way it can be proved now."

Minnie said hopelessly, "Well, anyway, I thought you ought to know about it. There must be some way to find out for sure whether or not he killed her. I thought maybe you could figure out something."

She went to her own room then, leaving me in a quandary. As far as I was concerned, murder was something you read about in the newspapers. I didn't want to think of it happening to someone in my own family.

But just suppose Minnie's suspicions were right? Just suppose Etien *had* murdered Aunt Bea? Was he to get off unscathed?

My mouth straightened.

Now that Minnie had planted the suspicion in my mind, I couldn't just leave without doing something to find out whether Etien was guilty or innocent. I sincerely hoped he was innocent. But if he weren't—!

Again I seemed to see the body of Aunt Bea, so pathetically huddled there at the foot of the stairs.

BUT Etien had murdered Aunt Bea, all right. It was ridiculously easy for me to find out. For his was only animal cunning, and he was stupid enough to let me trap him.

After Minnie had left, I knew that what I had told her was true. There was no way we could prove the charge. There was only one possible way in which I might learn the truth. By setting a verbal trap for Etien. I had nothing to lose by it, if he were innocent. At the worst, I would only incur his enmity, a matter of small importance to me since I didn't want his friendship anyway.

Accordingly, that afternoon, I went downstairs and prowled around till I found him on the terrace. The other servants had left when Minnie had gone, for Etien was closing the house preparatory to returning to France. I was to leave myself the following morning.

He looked up as I came out. I leaned against the balustrade, facing him, and I smiled wisely for his benefit.

"I waited until we were alone to thank you. Nice going," I said confidently.

His eyebrows jumped. "What do you mean?"

"Getting rid of Aunt Bea. Something I've often wanted to do myself. But, then, I lacked your nerve."

Perhaps he'd been sitting there, thinking of his crime guiltily, for he leaped from his chair now, a bundle of nerves.

"You can't prove anything!" the fool cried.

It wasn't conclusive, but it was admission enough to encourage me to go on.

"Oh, proof," I said carelessly. "Who wants to prove anything? Though, as a matter of fact, I wasn't asleep that night, and my door was partly open, and I saw you—"

He was white with terror. "You—you saw me push her?" he said hoarsely, giving himself away completely.

The hands in my pockets clenched, but I kept them there. I wasn't going to ruin everything by acting impulsively. For the same reason, I had to allay any suspicion he might have that I meant to harm him.

I said, "Yes, I saw you. But you don't think I care, do you? After all, she'd been a nuisance to me for some time. Always dragging me up here, away from my business, on some hare-brained errand. I owe you a debt of gratitude, really. It was clever of you to manage it so neatly."

"Yes, it was." The fool actually preened himself, and the color came back into his face. "Why shouldn't I admit it, I haven't anything to fear." His eyes narrowed shrewdly. "For even if you told, it would be only your word against mine."

"Exactly," I said softly. "How right you are."

Right in every respect, I thought, save one.

He did have something to fear, though he didn't know it.

Me.

I HAD to kill him. Myself. Don't you see? It was the only way. He had to pay the penalty for murdering Aunt Bea, and I had to be his judge, jury, and executioner in one since there was no proof that would stand in a court of law.

I would be committing a crime, I knew, in the eyes of the world and the moral law. And for that reason it had, of necessity, to be the perfect crime. For I didn't want to run my own neck into a noose.

I went to my room and considered ways and means. It was much more difficult than you would perhaps suppose. If you've always led a law-abiding life, murder plots do not suggest themselves readily to your imagination. Particularly a successful murder plot, not meant to be unraveled.

I paced my room for three hours, thinking, smoking cigarettes chain-fashion. And every time I thought of something, I was forced to discard it finally. Too dangerous. To me.

I never once thought of *The Black Madonna.* Yet it was she, indirectly, who smoothed my way for me.

Etien knocked on my door, and when I opened it, I saw that he was ghastly pale and craven with terror.

He could hardly speak. He came in and shut the door, and leaned against it as if something were coming after him.

"The painting!" he said hoarsely. "The Madonna is bleeding again! I just saw it!"

"Nonsense!" I said. And I said it convincingly. Good God, everything would be ruined! I couldn't afford to have him growing suspicious of me.

My disbelief only angered him. He grabbed my arm, and led me downstairs to the morning room.

THE scar on the Madonna's cheek was again glistening wetly. Again I touched it with my forefinger, and it came away red. In spite of myself I wondered if there could be anything to that old legend. For certainly I had it in mind to see that Etien was despatched from this world violently.

And I felt a faint chill.

"I'm going to die!" Etien moaned. He was actually sobbing with fright. "I'm going to die! Unless—unless—" Hope flickered faintly in his face. "Maybe if I go away from here! If I hide from the Madonna!"

And then I saw the solution to my problem in a flash. Everything fell into place at once. It was so simple, no wonder it had eluded me.

I hid a smile, and pretended concern. "Of course, Etien. That's what you must do.

Leave here immediately. Come, I'll drive you in to the station."

Terror is certainly a powerful emotion. He wouldn't even wait long enough to pack a bag. He had money, plenty of money, he said. He could buy what he needed when he was safely away.

What wits he had were completely addled by fright. Apparently it never even occurred to him to be suspicious of me. He practically dragged me out to my car. It was only a matter of minutes before we were turning off the private lane onto the mountain highway.

"Faster!" he kept urging me. "Faster!"

He was certainly asking for it. The irony of it nearly killed me. Yes, I'd go faster, Etien, gladly! I knew just the spot I wanted. A hair-pin curve, halfway down a long grade. Just beyond the curve there was a sheer drop of twenty-five hundred feet.

We approached the curve at seventy miles an hour, and I applied the brakes, cutting our speed sharply, leaving a long curved skid mark for the police to find—later.

We were almost at the bend. I straightened the car out of its skid, and gave it the gun, my left hand on the door handle.

Etien had just time to turn his head and look at me inquiringly at this new burst of speed.

"Slower!" he screamed then. "You can't make that turn if—"

How right he was! I didn't even try to turn. I headed straight for the white-painted guard rail.

He must have known what I was about, there at the end. For he screamed again hoarsely, and tried to wrest the wheel from my relentless grasp. In a flash he saw it was hopeless, turned to claw at the door-handle on his side. The door-handle that had been broken so long. He didn't even have time to get the window down, as I had known he wouldn't.

He screamed again, a long-drawn-out wail, just as I opened the door on my side, and jumped.

I hit the gravel just a split-second before the car struck the guard-rail, demolishing it with a sound like a pistol shot.

I was lying in the road, my arm buckled under me. It seemed a long, long time before any sound reached my ears. Minutes almost before there was the screaming rend and tear of steel, and the brittle shattering of glass.

It sounded like music to me.

I'D BROKEN my arm when I jumped, but I hardly felt the pain. It was worth it. And it would serve to make my story more convincing if I were hurt myself.

I was dizzy, and my face was scratched with gravel. But despite this and the broken arm, I managed to get to my feet finally, and walk back to *La Casa Encantada.*

There was one thing I did before I called the police. I went in and looked at *The Black Madonna.* And smiled with satisfaction.

The scar was perfectly dry!

I had my story ready for the police when they came in answer to my phone call.

"I was going too fast, and I jammed on the brakes for the turn. The car skidded in the loose gravel, and went out of control. I yelled to De Marsigny to jump, but—but he couldn't. I never remembered that the door handle on his side was broken."

They questioned me again and again, but they couldn't shake my story. A wire to my chief mechanic in Santa Luisa confirmed my statement that the door handle had been broken for days.

The insurance people were even more persistent in their questioning. Persistent enough to have me worried there for a while, though I hid it skilfully, I know.

I think I convinced them at last that I was guilty of nothing more than criminal carelessness at the worst.

I'm still at Aunt Bea's. And they haven't been near me for days. I think they believed me. I'm sure they believed me. I've been positive I committed the perfect crime, and will never go to the chair.

But today I'm not so confident as once I was. I must have slipped up some place. And I'm afraid they'll be back here again.

For *The Black Madonna* belongs to *me now. . . .*
. . . and The Black Madonna *is bleeding.*

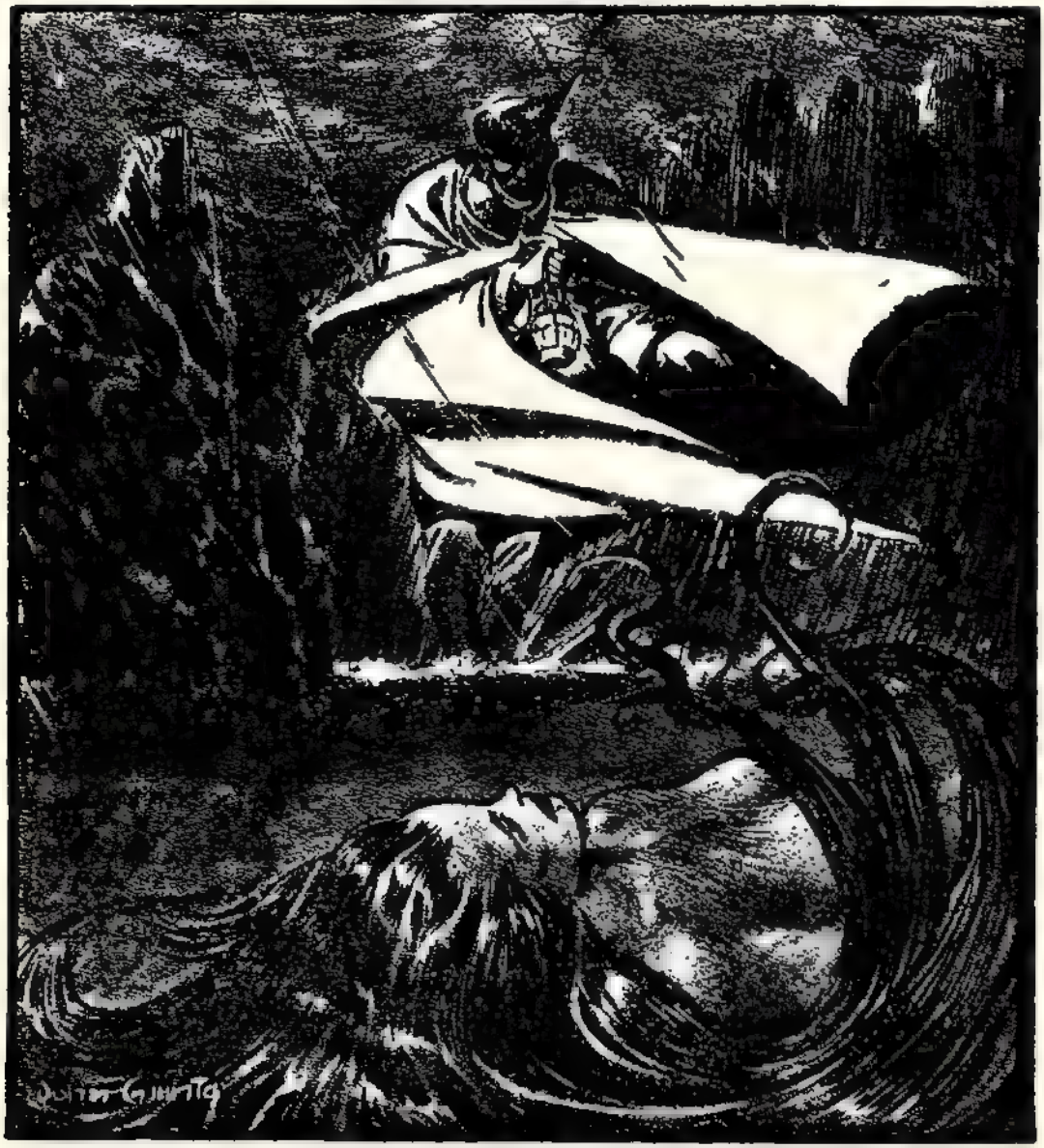
Loup-Garou

BY MANLY BANISTER

SOMETIMES a stranger drops in at our Club. He's always made welcome, attended to, and sped on his way. We are rather reserved, though, and do not ask questions. Consequently, we learn no more about such folk than they are willing to divulge.

Sometimes, they will enter into our dis-

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA



Some have tried to get to the bottom of the werewolf legend—some have succeeded but not as mortals!

cussions and provide us further food for thought on the part of our philosophies. And so it was with the tall, brown-faced stranger who looked prosperous and smoked a fine cigar.

Our philosophy had turned . . . or had it been directed, I wonder? . . . to the supernatural. Lycanthropy was the subject, and we endeavored through speculation to arrive at the absolute root of the were-wolf legend.

The stranger smiled at the trend of our discussion, flashed white teeth, and observed with a soft, pleasantly foreign accent: "I have no knowledge how the first stories of were-wolves began, but perhaps, Messieurs, you would be interested in such an occurrence that took place in my native France."

He looked over our group with a peculiarly brilliant, penetrating glance. We all nodded acquiescence.

"Go ahead," I urged. "At least, it will take up the time before dinner."

The stranger nodded again with a lupine smirk that was meant for a smile.

"Most appropriate, too," he remarked, "as tonight is the full moon. We have perhaps half an hour."

He looked around at us brightly once more and began.

WHAT I am about to tell you, related the stranger, happened—or did not happen, as you choose to believe—about a century ago. It concerns an official named Hubert de Montreuil, and the occurrence took place in the province of—what does it matter, its name? It exists no longer.

To understand Hubert, you must understand his environment and background. He was average French middle class, reared in the brawling Paris of those times. As a youth, he fought continuously with his classmates, and once struck the *maître d'école* so smartly that he broke the professor's glasses and was consequently expelled from school.

By the time he was twenty, Hubert was tall, dark. He had piercing eyes and an insolent curl to his lips. And he was thin . . . *le jeune homme maigre* he was called by all who knew him. The thin young man he was; his thinness was his trademark, and he bore himself wolfishly aloof.

Hubert was intelligent . . . keenly so. But sharp. And ambitious, as well as thoroughly unscrupulous. I could tell you of his *affaires* . . . but never mind. There was only one that mattered.

Hubert was shrewd enough to see where the money lay. He set his ambition to become governor of a province, and so worried his parents for money and ever more money in the attainment of his ambition, that he finally drove them broken-hearted and empty-pursed to the grave.

Hubert was not sorry. He thrived through the misfortunes of others. In ten years—the ten years it took him to drive his poor parents to untimely death—he rode through his schooling with brilliant honors. Law School. The Sorbonne. *Berliner Universität. Les écoles de gouvernement. Collège du haut magistrat.* He studied in fantastic places. Always brilliantly—always expensively.

He made contacts. He pulled strings. He spent money. He became the governor of a province.

Hubert was the marvel of the time. Thirty years old, and governor of a province! Messieurs, such a feat were impossible for anyone except Hubert de Montreuil!

The Republic then fumbled in its childhood. Money, judiciously placed here and there, played a large part in Hubert's advancement.

Hubert took his governorship seriously. That is to say, Hubert set himself to dreaming dreams of the future, with the governorship as a starting mark instead of a goal.

The little town of d'Aubrecourt was like many another town of its day. Its *chaumières* clustered about the public square, sleepy, placid, a little aloof from the world. The town nestled in a wooded valley. There were hills all around, sombre, dark in the light of the moon, teeming with superstition and imagery for the townsfolk.

The Palais du Gouverneur occupied a hilltop above d'Aubrecourt. From its solemn, stone windows, one could gaze across the town, and on a clear day see the sparkle of the sun on Lac de Lune, a beautiful sheet of water popular in summer for sailing and in the winter for ice skating. The life of d'Aubrecourt was like a story in a picture-book—a round of *fêtes*, carnivals, seasonal holidays, with all their simple color of French festivity.

And there were the farms—rich farmlands below the foothills, and mines, and travel agencies. Upon all these the scheming mind of Hubert de Montreuil fastened itself avidly. Riches were within his grasp. He had but to reach forth and seize them—*droit de gouverneur.*

Hubert installed himself grandly in the Palais. Before the Revolution, it had been the home of a famous Court favorite. Now it was seedy and fallen into disrepair.

Hubert pressed peasants into service to put the dwelling into livable shape, promising payment through cancellation of taxes. He cancelled the taxes of his laborers, of course, but took produce in equal value from their farms instead and glibly explained he had but cancelled the cash payments.

Were the peasants bitter? You know they were. They had not yet begun to feel the full weight of the heavy hand of Hubert de Montreuil.

In five years, the peasants were on the verge of ruin . . . so, also, the merchants, the mine-owners, and the keepers of travel-agencies. Hubert rolled in wealth in his palace.

It was the percentage that passed on through Hubert's hands that kept him there.

IT WAS on a miserable, rainy night in April that a carriage rolled up to the ornate *porte-cochère* of the Palais du Gouverneur, and the Commissaire de Police, Pierre de Cardinois, got down. Pierre was so fat he puffed when he walked, and his face was as red as the wine he bibbed so freely. But now his face was gray, and his breath was shorter than usual when he spoke.

"Monsieur le Gouverneur, it is a grave thing I come to report. It is requested—" he paused to puff arduously, "—it is requested that—that the militia be. . . ."

Hubert de Montreuil crashed the tankard from which he was drinking down upon the oaken table. His mustaches flared and bristled.

"*Que diable!* There is not an uprising of the people?"

"*Mais non!*" the Commissaire protested vigorously, and added somewhat bitterly, "though why there should not be is beyond me. It is graver than that."

Hubert leaned back in his fine, carved chair and laughed.

"Graver than that, *hein?* Pierre, you are a fool. Nothing could be graver than that. Strictly speaking, we are not robbing the good folk of our land, but there are some who might not draw so fine a line of distinction as we. But, what is this trouble?"

Pierre shuddered. "*Loup-garou!* A were-wolf roams the forest. All winter, the people have whispered of him. He has come down from the mountains, and roams now in the foothills, *cette bête du diable. . . .*"

Hubert threw his tankard into a corner. It clattered resoundingly.

"Nonsense, Pierre! Old wives tale! Is that what you have driven here tonight through the storm to tell me?"

Pierre de Cardinois pressed fat lips into a thin line, drew himself haughtily erect. "*C'est la vérité*—it is the truth! With my own eyes, I have seen the body of the old woman who. . . ."

"So this old woman *loup-garou* has you afraid, Pierre?"

"It is not the old woman who is the were-wolf," replied the Commissaire slowly. "She is its victim!"

Scoffer though he was, Hubert de Montreuil was superstitious enough in his way. He snarled.

"I will have to be shown! Attend while I cloak myself, and you will drive me to this so detestable scene!"

It was raining horribly when the two men darted from the *porte-cochère* into the shelter of the carriage.

"*Allez, donc!*" the Commissaire called out to the driver. The carriage lurched in unison with the stamping of horses' hooves, and the wheels commenced to grind in mud and gravel.

The governor maintained grim silence while the carriage took its way tortuously down the mountainside, passed through the streaming village, and entered the dripping forest on the other side. Pierre broke the silence only once.

"There is a group of peasants watching over the body with lanterns. We will see their light before we come upon them."

They found a half dozen peasants hud-

died miserably in the doubtful shelter of a fir tree, while the forest literally swam around them. Each held tightly to a lantern, and they were so like a clustered group of fireflies that the governor almost smiled to observe them.

It was obvious that the men were afraid. They kept darting quick, fearful glances about, and when Hubert swung his thin, cloaked figure down from the carriage step, they drew back sullenly. It was necessary to speak harshly to them to be led to the body.

Maman Vasinois, her name was. A harmless old lady of the village. She had been visiting the hut of the forester's wife, and they had the word of that good woman, that Maman had left at moonrise to return to her home in the town. One of the watching peasants was her son, and this one explained that he had worried over the continued absence of his mother and had gone in search for her, only to stumble upon this frightful cadaver.

Not even the strong stomach of Hubert de Montreuil could restrain itself when his eye fell upon the remains of Maman Vasinois. Blood was a black pool everywhere, foaming in the rain, soaking into the needled turf. There were gouts of flesh ripped from the carcass and flung contemptuously about, and there were the marks of strong, long teeth. . . .

"The rain," spoke up the Commissaire, "has vanished the tracks, Monsieur. But I, myself, saw them before. Wolf-tracks—large as the palm of my own hand!"

"Vraiment!" snarled the governor. "But could it not have been an ordinary wolf, perhaps . . . or a large, wild dog? I am ashamed that you, Pierre de Cardinois, have permitted this story of a were-wolf to circulate! See that it is stopped immediately!" Hubert turned to the huddled peasants. "You, too, have heard. And now you will see to it that this body is returned to the town and prepared for a decent burial. Or is it that you fear the return of the were-wolf?" He essayed a taunting laugh.

The dead woman's son shook himself stolidly, answered in a low voice.

"Non, monsieur. The *loup-garou* will not return tonight. The rain, you see, is running water, and the wolf is now again in the shape of a man, for the running water changes them. But—" and he fixed the governor with a dull eye, "there will be other nights of full moon, and other victims. Who can say whence comes this *bête du diable*, or whether it might not be one of us, among our very selves?"

Hubert de Montreuil struck the man on the flat of his face with his leather gloves.

"Saligaud! Did I not say there would be no more talk of were-wolves? Be about your task now, as I ordered you!"

Saying this, the governor swung himself angrily into the carriage, followed by the puffing corpulence of Commissaire Pierre de Cardinois. Light from the lanterns without fell through a chink in the carriage curtains athwart the governor's lean face, which was grim under its sick greenness. The Commissaire shrugged and called to the driver.

"On fait retour au Palais!"

The driver backed his team, swung the carriage, and made back along the way to the Governor's Palace.

"Maman Vasinois was very popular in the village," the Commissaire said after a while, shouting to make himself heard above the sloshing of hooves, the grind of the wheels, and the tom-tom beat of rain on the carriage roof.

THE governor was silent. He knew in his heart that no ordinary beast was responsible for the devastating havoc he had seen. The old woman had been killed with the most wanton kind of savagery, the kind of savagery popular belief attributed to the *loup-garou*—the ghost wolf—the creature who is man and not man, and becomes a howling, ravenous wolf with the full of the moon. Yet, Hubert could not contribute to the fears of the people. He could only deny them, harshly laugh them down. Meanwhile, he needed to think. He was very good at thinking, that one!

But his thinking was interrupted by a shuddering lurch of the carriage as it came to a sudden, creaking halt. The horses were rearing and backing, while the driver cursed and swung his whip ineffectually. The governor thrust his head out into the rain.

"Holà que va donc?"

"There is some one in the road, monsieur," the driver called back. "I cannot see

very plainly, but some one is lying there, and the horses almost trod upon him!"

The governor swung his lean frame quickly down from the carriage and darted through the rain. Sure enough, there was a body lying there, in the middle of the road. He drew back hastily from touching it as the revolting recollection of Maman Vasinois' remains entered his mind. He backstepped to the carriage, took down one of its lanterns, and advanced upon the still form.

It was a woman, utterly naked, and as beautiful as they tell you about in stories. Her flanks were scratched and muddied, and the rain and the mud were in her flaming red hair. On her face was the pallor of death, but none of this destroyed her appeal, only served to make her more savagely beautiful, so that at once, at sight of her, Hubert de Montreuil lost his mind completely and was madly in love.

He gasped only once, then set down the lantern and knelt by the unconscious woman. It took but a moment to determine that she lived, then he had her up in his arms, and he strode hastily toward the carriage, shouting at the same time to the driver to retrieve the lantern and to drive like a mad one to the village and the apothecary's establishment.

The apothecary, who was also the village doctor, was old, and he came grumbling to answer the thunderous knocking at his door, for he had already retired and was dressed only in night-shirt and cap.

He fell silent at sight of his visitor, however, and fell nimbly to work when the governor had comfortably disposed the maid upon a couch.

Wrapped finally in warm blankets, plied with stimulants, the young woman responded slightly. Her face commenced to show a faint pinkness in the elfin light of candles, and she seemed to sleep naturally.

"Hélàs, la pauvre!" murmured the apothecary. "It is evident she has had a bad time of it. But she will get along well, now. I should say she will awaken quite normally in the morning."

The governor ceased his nervous pacing and glared down upon the apothecary.

"What is her trouble? How did she come to be lying there in the wood-road? She was not there when we drove out but a few moments before!"

The apothecary shrugged. *"Qui sait, monsieur . . .* who knows? *Cette enfant,* she has suffered some terrible emotional strain. That much is apparent. Fear? Perhaps. As you can surmise, she ran swiftly through the forest—cut herself on flying branches. She exhausted herself. Why? I am only an apothecary, *monsieur.* I do not also read minds."

The governor hunched his shoulders threateningly and glared even more fiercely upon the fellow.

"No? But perhaps you can read mine now?"

The apothecary fell back a step, trembling. *"Mais certainement, monsieur!* You may trust my discretion. I swear I will whisper nothing."

"See that you do not, then," retorted the governor.

He took the sleeping girl, blankets and all, up in his arms, and carried her at once back to the carriage.

"On to the Palace!" he ordered curtly.

HUBERT DE MONTREUIL was like a fiend, that night. Upon reaching his palace, he shouted for servants, hailed his own personal physician out of bed, got every last lackey in the place to running and stumbling, rubbing the sleep from their eyes with one hand, the while that they did his bidding with the other. In this fashion, the east apartment of the Palace, overlooking the garden, was made ready for the fair lady's sojourn.

There Hubert placed her in a comfortable bed, still unconscious, voluptuous breasts stirring rhythmically with her breathing. That done, Hubert ordered everyone to bed, almost forcibly ejected his old friend, the Commissaire de Police, and settled down to wait the night through at the bedside of his red-haired love.

What had come over him? Even Hubert was at a loss to put his fierce feeling into words. Fierce, indeed, it was, for in what other fashion could a man whose very life was the epitome of violence and disruption express the tenderest sentiment . . . love?

Hubert was literally engulfed in the throes of mad, nameless passion. As is often the wont, his passion was accompanied

by fear—fear that this gorgeous woman whom fortune had cast into his path might not survive, and he should lose her before he had a chance to win her.

So he sat the night through, brow darkly knitted, gnawing upon his mustaches, not daring even so much as to touch the pale, white hand that lay without the coverlet. Meantime, he fruitlessly burned and yearned to cover with kisses the soft, waxen cheeks, the scarlet lips, the tender curve of her throat, where it gleamed ivory in the lamplight.

At dawn, the woman awakened. She awakened quite naturally, as had been foretold, stirred a little, and sat up, permitting the coverlet to fall to her navel. She looked at Hubert blankly, without rancor or embarrassment.

Hubert was at her side in an instant, heavy-eyed though he was.

"Mademoiselle!" cried he. "You must not endeavor—no, you must not think of getting up! Lie back, Mademoiselle. You have been ill."

Mademoiselle lay back, with Hubert's arm around her sleek-skinned back and stared up at him with eyes of cloudy blue.

Despite Hubert's iron self-control, he could not prevent his glance wandering whither it willed, and the maid lay unclad to the waist. Instantly, his eye was taken by a small tattoo, blue upon the clear white of her skin, just below the small, round breast on her right side. It was a name—Clarisse.

"Clarisse!" whispered Hubert, and bent forward as if to touch the spot with his lips, but Mademoiselle quickly drew up the coverlet.

"To whom am I indebted, monsieur?" she asked quietly.

Overcome with confusion, Herbert got to his feet and clumsily introduced himself, though the bow he managed was rather stiff, owing to the night he had passed in the chair.

"Consider yourself welcome, Mademoiselle," he concluded. "Meanwhile, depend upon me to seek out your friends and relatives. So tell me your name and theirs, too, and soon you will be with friends again."

A shadow came upon Mademoiselle's face. She swept scarlet tresses back from her cheeks and sighed.

"Hélàs, so far as I know, I have none. I know no more about myself than you know. Since I awakened just now, I have tried to remember, and all is blank."

Hubert de Montreuil tried not to let the elation show upon his face. He twirled his mustaches.

"Quel dommage! A pity, Mademoiselle, that shock has absconded with your memory! However, your name is a clue. I shall do all in my power."

With that, Hubert discreetly withdrew. It was not well, he thought, to press too greatly his advantage at the start. There was time enough still.

BUT where the matter began, there it rested. Mademoiselle Clarisse drifted about the Governor's Palace in the very fine raiment Hubert provided for her. She was polite and coolly reserved. However Hubert sought to press his suit, he found himself charging up a blind alley, his quarry eluding him.

Moreover, he ascertained early in her stay that Clarisse locked the door of her apartment upon retiring, and he never saw her, once the sun was set.

Almost every night, therefore, Hubert walked in the garden beneath Mademoiselle's window. Always, her window was dark. Listen as he might, he heard nothing except the splashing of water in the fountain.

For all he knew, she might be sitting above there in her window, looking down upon his nocturnal stroll, laughing at him. The thought chagrined him.

So time went on. One morning, very early, Commissaire de Police Pierre de Cardinois came driving up to the Palace, bundled himself awkwardly across the landing of the *porte-cochère* shouting loudly for the governor to come at once.

Hubert was asleep, but a servant aroused him. He came down scowling, annoyed to to be awakened so early in the morning.

"Monsieur le gouverneur!" cried Pierre at sight of him. "Something *has* to be done! I have begged for militia, and begged again. Now, I demand it! I. . . ."

Hubert looked surly.

"What is nibbling now on your conscience, Pierre?"

Pierre's jowls quivered. His skin was like dried dough.

"The were-wolf struck again last night. There is no doubt. This time, it was a young woman, carrying her baby to a neighbor's for a pint of warm milk. It is not decided which pieces are of the mother and which are of the child." Pierre swallowed, wet his sickly, fat lips. "And after her, a young farm-hand, slashed down as he returned late from courting the girl he planned to marry!"

Hubert de Montreuil stiffened. He was enraged. The concept of a were-wolf was not only horrid to him, it was unbelievable. He forced back the bitter words on his tongue. There was something—*bein!* Last night had been the full moon. He recalled the remains of Maman Vasinois. He shuddered and passed his hand across his eyes.

"Very well, Pierre," he said quietly. "It is in your hands. Take whatever measures you see fit." He stood up very straight. "But mark you, *mon vieux,* you had better produce a were-wolf!"

THE countryside seethed. But for all its turbulence, nothing was produced. Pierre's militia . . . peasants impressed into service and armed with clubs, pitchforks, and blunderbusses . . . swarmed in thickets and copses. Every passing stranger was set upon, and lucky only to be hailed before a magistrate. There were beatings, and several near-lynchings.

As the following full-moon approached, a grimness settled down, and neighbor regarded neighbor with hostile fear and foreboding.

As for Hubert de Montreuil, his governorship languished. He was annoyed when the signing of papers and the bare necessities of his function interfered with his pursuit of Mademoiselle Clarisse. He was to be found with her always, walking upon the terrace, strolling in the garden about the tumbling fountain. He talked vehemently. He spoke passionately. He declared his love and vowed his everlasting devotion.

Mademoiselle had become more sombre and introspective as time passed. Although she physically accompanied Hubert, she appeared detached, disinterested. And when, in the violence of his protestations of ardor, Hubert demanded an answer of her, she smiled in the pale, quiet way she had had, brushed the flame-red hair back from her waxen cheeks, and Hubert was silenced.

After Mademoiselle had retired, Hubert was wont to consort with a wine-bottle. He would drink, stare in ugly humor at the wall, and curse most violently. He would look up at the ceiling overhead, in which direction lay the apartment of Mademoiselle Clarisse, and clench his fist. And so, he could stand it no longer.

Heavy in his cups, Hubert ascended the broad, curved stairs and began to beat upon Mademoiselle's door.

He cried out to her to open to him, but she offered no sound from within. Whereupon, Hubert staggered to the stairwell and shouted until servants came running, and these he ordered to burst open the door. And this they did.

Mademoiselle Clarisse made no sound in the room. It was very dark, except where a bar of golden moonlight glanced through the window and puddled upon the foot of her bed. Hubert, feeling already a little sobered, dismissed his servants and stood fidgetting at the door, undetermined whether or not to enter.

Finally, he got up his courage and took a step into the room. He whispered her name.

"Clarisse!"

There was no response.

"Answer, Clarisse, please. I would talk to you."

The wind rattled dryly among the ivy at the open window. It was dreadfully quiet. Hubert's glance pierced beyond the pool of moonlight, into the shadows that clustered thickly in the room. He crossed over quickly, felt the smooth, undisturbed bed. No Mademoiselle.

Fumbling, he lit the lamp on a night stand. By its dull, yellow glow he searched the room. Clarisse was neither under the bed, in the corners, nor in the closets. She was not in the room.

Hubert went to the windw and peered down into the shadowed garden. The full moon cast its golden wash over the swaying shrubs, the tinkling fountain. Suspicion, doubt . . . horrid things! . . . assailed him.

Clarisse was young. She was beautiful. What more natural than that, unbeknownst to him, a younger one than he had succeeded where he had failed, and even now. . . .

Hubert became very grim. His mind was black with the thought that filled it. He extinguished the lamp, drew a chair to the window, and settled himself in it, to wait. . . .

He dozed at last, overcome by wine, weariness, and the gnawing savagery of his emotion. Slowly the moon arched through the sky; the stars wheeled toward oblivion; and a paleness crept into the east.

Hubert awakened suddenly, stiff and cold. He moved sluggishly, and the chair creaked under him.

He cast a bloodshot glance into the garden. There had been a sound. Something had moved down there. He strained to see in the gloom. Surely, that shadow had moved! His lips tightened. He felt the bristling of his mustaches. And then he saw what he saw for sure.

A shadow detached itself from the shadow of the wall . . . a lean, gray shadow that slunk carefully among the shrubs, silently, on all fours and belly-flat. Hubert tingled at the back of his scalp.

Cautiously, the slinking, gray shape made its way toward the fountain, pausing to look this way and that, lifting its lean muzzle to scent the flat, pre-dawn wind.

Hubert remained rigid at the window, while the wolf crawled to the fountain, placed its forepaws upon the marble rim, and without a splash, slipped over and into the running water.

FOR an instant, swirling water glimmered in paling starshine, then parted; and a figure rose up, wrung the water from her dripping hair. The eastern sky was quite light. A deathly paleness reigned upon the garden. Quite plainly, Hubert saw Mademoiselle Clarisse step naked from the fountain, fling glittering droplets from her haunches, then trot quickly toward the window from which he watched. She was scrambling nimbly up the vine-covered wall as Hubert drew back and departed quickly.

Should he go at once to her, with the day, and tell her what he had seen, what he knew? He recoiled from the thought. Should he denounce her to the Commissaire de Police as the were-wolf he hunted? The suggestion revolted him. Such beauty as that of Clarisse was meant for man to enjoy, not destroy. What should he do?

For a long time—many days—Hubert did nothing. Nothing, that is, except wrestle with himself.

Mademoiselle Clarisse remained her usual self. Pale, aloof, smiling. She said nothing of the damage she must have noticed had accrued to her door. Only now, when Hubert in his agony would have avoided her, she sought him, as if for the express purpose of showing him she really was no different.

"Are you angry with me, Hubert?" she asked quietly. "I would not have you angry with me!"

SHE looked into his eyes, and Hubert felt his senses spin. The hot curve of her lips mocked him; a throbbing pulse in her ivory throat taunted him. He fought with the urge to seize her in his arms, to kiss her, to fondle her, to bury his twitching face in the flaming oblivion of her hair. He fought and won. He left her quickly, and sent a lackey for the Commissaire de Police.

Pierre was in an intolerant mood. The last foray of the were-wolf, he asserted, had resulted in four victims, although all four were safely indoors and had barred the doors and windows of their *chaumière*. Nonetheless, *la bête du diable* had leaped upon the roof, burrowed through the thatch, and devoured them. Not one of the terrorized cottage inhabitants had escaped.

Hubert looked across the room at Mademoiselle Clarisse, at her scarlet-tinted nails, and wondered what bruises that stain concealed.

"Leave us, my dear," he told her. "I have some matters of state to talk over with the Commissaire."

Clarisse smiled her soft, strangely bewitching smile and drifted out of the room.

"*Hein?*" queried Pierre. "What is it you would talk of?"

Hubert pawed his mustaches restlessly.

"Pierre, I have not been asleep. No, not

me. I have kept awake, and I have done what you have not."

"You accuse me of laxness in my duty?" cried Pierre. "What have you discovered of importance that *I* do not know?"

Hubert smiled tiredly and closed his eyes. "*Mon vieux*, I have discovered your *loup-garou*."

Pierre sat with mouth agape. He began to babble. "But who? Who is this *bête du diable*? Tell me at once, that I may—"

The governor waved his hand for silence.

"All in good time, Pierre, the creature will be delivered to you. One does not accuse a were-wolf and dispose of him by ordinary means, remember. But no. It is necessary to be wary. It is necessary to employ the proper weapons!"

"I am dreaming," said Pierre, nervously patting the broad hulk of his stomach. "For once, the governor does not fall dead with apoplexy at mention of the were-wolf. For once, the governor also believes in the *loup-garou!*"

Hubert wagged his head.

"That is neither here nor there, *mon vieux*. It will be necessary to enlist the aid of the clergy . . . secure *l'eau bénit* . . . mould the bullets of silver. You know all that. Have it done. I will show you the place at the foot of my garden to set your trap for the fiend. That is all. The rest is up to you . . . on the night of full moon."

Le Commissaire de Police went out, tottering. Hubert had steadfastly refused to divulge the name of the were-wolf. Was he imagining? Was he making sport of him, Pierre de Cardinois, Commissaire de Police? What a one, *celui-là!*

ALTHOUGH summer was at hand and the weather fine, the days were dark and filled with torment for Hubert de Montreuil. He walked as usual with the beautiful maid at his side, yearned for her, and reflected upon his treason.

He thought with sorrow of the long days, the months and empty years ahead. He could not bear it! He must save her from his own perfidy.

It was sunset, and they strolled together in the garden. Clarisse looked anxiously at the darkening sky, up to the window of her apartment, and made a motion to withdraw. Hubert seized her in his arms.

"No!" he cried. "No, no, Clarisse, my love—you shall not go! I will tell you that I know your secret—saw you from your own window. I know you for what you are, but I love you. . . ."

Clarisse stiffened in his grasp, and as suddenly relaxed.

"I felt that you knew," she said quietly. She sighed. "I am sorry, too. It has presented a problem, but perhaps it is best that you know." She smiled her pale, winning smile and brushed the fiery cloud of her hair back from clear-skinned cheeks. "Hubert, I can tell you now that I come from a very fine family that thinks me dead. Better that, than that they should know the truth. It would do them great harm if my secret became known. When this. . . . Change first came upon me, I left home." She hung her head.

Hubert squeezed her passionately. "It does not matter, my dearest. Nothing matters now. . . ."

And he pressed his first kiss upon her, felt her yield in his arms, return his caress. And so ardently did he press his passion upon her, that he did not feel the tiny thrill of pain in his lip, the piercing nip of sharp teeth in his flesh. It was only when he drew back from her, panting, that he saw the drop of blood, more scarlet yet than her scarlet mouth, and knew that it came from himself. Clarisse smiled dreamily, twined her arms about him.

"I have drawn your blood, Hubert," she murmured huskily. "When the full moon rises tonight, you will be the same as I."

"I—a were-wolf, too?"

She held him close, arching her body against him.

"It was the only way, Hubert, love. Otherwise, you might have denounced me, destroyed me. Now that we are the same, we'll go on together, living forever, as our kind does, unless we meet the fatal silver. But we can take care of that, can we not? Imagine, darling, an eternity with me, always like this. . . ."

Swirling clouds of flame licked at Hubert's brain. He forgot himself utterly in that savage moment, for the virus was quick, and its effect destroyed the mind as

well as the body. Hubert gloried in his new-found estate, and hungered for the delights it promised him.

Suddenly her hand was heavy upon his shoulder.

"Twilight is here. The moon will soon rise—"

Leaping fire twisted in Hubert's veins. He was only half aware while he stripped away his garments, trod eagerly at the side of the naked Clarisse. Nor was the shock of water upon his body of consequence as he dipped with her in the fountain, and he writhed in the ecstacy of change wrought by the running water upon his bones, muscles, and sinews. . . .

The moon lifted its golden rim above the hills. The powdered stars drew back from its saffron glow. The night wind breathed softly in the trees. The air was redolent with the scent of blossoms. To Hubert, there had never been such sensual delight, such dreadful depth of feeling. He shook the water from his heavy coat in a shower of sparkling drops, and trotted along the path, belly down, behind the slim, graceful, gray-wolf shape of Clarisse.

Hubert thought her more beautiful thus, than she had been as woman, and his heart filled and seemed to burst with yearning.

Confidently, she went ahead, and where the path divided, she took the way that led among the shrubs at the foot of the garden.

Hubert paused at the fork; a strange feeling knifed at his brain . . . a thought, a memory. And then, in a rush, his mind was alive with dreadful significance. He remembered the ambush he had planned.

He tried to cry out—call to his mate. But there was no voice in his wolf-throat. He could not speak with the lungs and the jaws of a wolf, and already Clarisse had disappeared ahead, among the clustering shadows at the lower end of the garden.

Hubert stood rigid, wolf-paws planted, and he heard it—heard the crackling volley of firearms, and the high, shrill scream. Then he heard the triumphant shouting of men, and his man-brain understood the words they said, and fathomed deeper, sounded the empty depths of his own bitter future.

The gray wolf-shape dropped its head, sank belly-wise to the ground, and whimpering, crawled away into the dark, into the loneliness, into the ever-burgeoning fear of an unknown existence. . . .

WE WERE silent when the stranger had finished the story of Hubert de Montreuil.

"It was a good story, was it not?" he asked, rising.

A Club member snorted. "Very entertaining, but scarcely true!"

The stranger smiled with a lupine expression and glanced at his pocket watch.

"I should be delighted to discuss it further with you, gentlemen, but I fear I have used up all my time." His teeth flashed. "As I reminded you, there is a full moon tonight. It rises in something less than four minutes. You might enjoy hunting were-wolves on the back streets tonight!"

Somebody grunted, and the stranger left us, smiling strangely. Discussion broke out abruptly, expressed in a series of violent negatives.

"An entertaining chap," remarked a Club member, "with a flair for unusual fiction. I doubt he meant us to believe him."

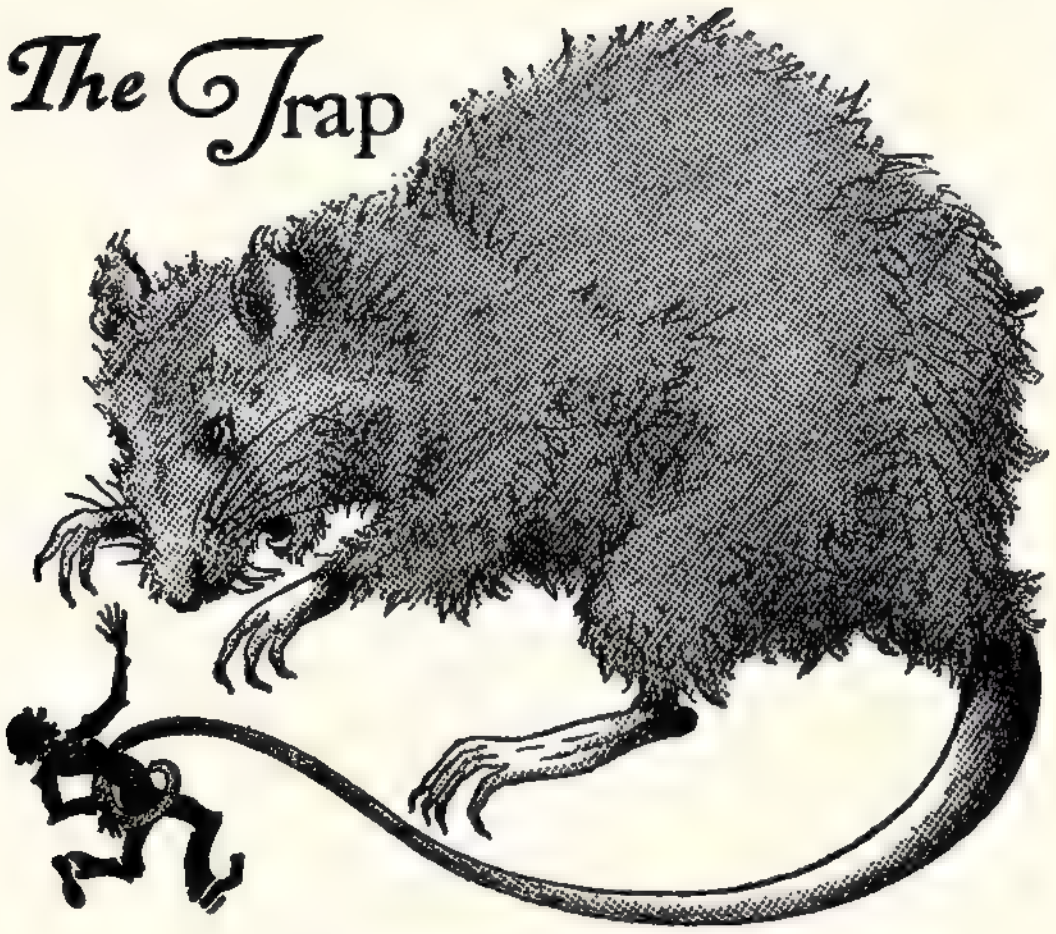
"No," said I, with my eye on the washroom door, through which the lean stranger had disappeared, "No, he was just an entertaining stranger. . . ."

The washroom door was swinging open. It swung shut again, and nobody that I could see had come out, but a leather lounge chair obscured the lower part of the door from my view.

I turned my attention to a remark directed at me, and when I looked back, my glance drawn by a semblance of shadow that had seemed to flit across the space to the open street door, I stiffened. A large dog stood there, a large, gray dog. My glance briefly engaged that of the animal, and the creature smiled, grinned at me, so it seemed, then turned and vanished among the gray shadows that crowded the street.

A dog, I thought . . . it might as easily be a wolf!

The Trap



BY WALTER HARWOOD

GIVEN enough luck, a man can have cranberry jelly in his head instead of brains, and he will still get somewhere in life. By the same token, if the breaks go against you, hard work and talent will accomplish so much less than nothing.

In a word, Horatio Alger's opinions about business success are hokum. Meredith is a case in point. He was intelligent, insensitive, and selfish—a splendid combination for advancing in the world, largely by trampling over others; yet, dogged by bad luck, he marked time while lesser men forged ahead. When he retired, his pension was modest, and, characteristically, he did not manage to live long enough to get much benefit from it . . . but that is our story.

The office "gang," appropriately thankful to be rid of an unpopular colleague, spared no expense. Their gift was a top-quality Gladstone bag with several more than the usual assortment of zipper features. Down at the Club, where Meredith was tolerated, even if not liked, the common remark was:

Heading by M. N. BEALE

A life is a life and who is to say where an animal being ends and a human begins

"I suppose they hoped he'd take the damn bag and go to China."

Meredith did not, of course, go to China or anywhere else; not on his pension. He had bought, seemingly at a bargain price, a sturdy, unpretentious bungalow at the northern end of Dunbar Street. He was almost out in the country, a condition not particularly to his liking, but he had made a good purchase—or so he originally thought—and, with no rent to pay, he could live inexpensively.

Furthermore, he had space behind the house for a vegetable garden, which would constitute another source of saving. The garage attached to the house was sufficiently large both for his car and for a workbench. When bored with his housework or hobbies, he could whisk down to the Club in half an hour.

The summer was fairly far advanced, so Meredith contented himself with planting some beans, peas, and corn, and tidying up the place for the next year. Ordinarily neat to the point of being fussy, he gained, by annoyed reaction, additional inspiration from the sprawling chicken ranch just across the creek, half a block upstream. The place was an eyesore, even by contrast with the dilapidated neighborhood. In particular, Meredith was disgusted to see rats—apparently a regular colony of them—on a tiny island in the center of the narrow creek. His observations soon convinced him that, in part, the colony depended for its survival upon forays made upon the ranch. Brinton, one of the Club members, was an amateur ornithologist, and Meredith borrowed his extra pair of field glasses, though the loan was made a bit reluctantly. By the aid of the glasses, Meredith was able to examine the rats at close range, and later to report his findings to Brinton, who had expressed some interest in the matter.

The rats were scrawny, as befitted their inhospitable circumstances, and their coats were sparse, harsh, and patchy-looking. But the beady black eyes were bright and, especially when seen for the first time, almost uncanny in their suggestion of intelligence. Loathsome verminous beasts; call them what you will, but they were skilful tacticians, as they soon proved. Meredith's confident remark, "Oh, it's just instinct," did not impress Brinton as a fully adequate explanation.

As a rule, the raids occurred during the noon hour, when the two Baluta brothers, the proprietors of the ranch, could be depended upon to be in the house for their heavy meal of the day. The invading rodents worked in pairs. Meredith lost sight of them when they entered the tall grass beyond the creek. On their return, if successful, the pair presented a strange spectacle. One rat was on its back, the stolen egg clutched snugly and securely between his four paws and body, while the other rat, linked tail-to-tail with his partner, swiftly and easily pulled him down across the bank to the edge of the water. And now occurred the most unbelievable feature of the sequence. Signals must have been exchanged by sight or sound, for at once a group of rats, also in pairs, swam out toward the bank, and the slender stream of water was spanned by a pontoon arrangement of linked bodies. The grotesque sleigh was promptly drawn over this bridge.

THE Baluta brothers did not always suffer these depredations with Christian humility and resignation. On the contrary, they were spasmodically aroused to action by their losses, and then, equipped with .22 caliber rifles, they tramped in water up to their knees, swearing volubly and gleefully, apparently anticipating an orgy of slaughter. When they reached the island, furious shooting occurred, manifestly unhandicapped by a concern for municipal regulations. Since the rats invariably managed to depart *en masse* in ordered haste before the arrival of their enemy, the purpose of the wild shooting was hard to determine, though the two brothers would probably have spoken of "givin' 'em a hell of a scare," and considered this as adequate justification for their futile activity.

Recounting the episode to Brinton (but neglecting to return the field glasses), Meredith snorted in disgust "A child would show more sense about it, but those bloody foreigners are so ham-handed and dumb. . . ." His shrug was a gesture of contempt. "Well, if it were my problem . . ."

It soon was.

Although a bungalow, Meredith's house

had a shallow raftered attic storeroom beneath a sloping roof, with a straight stairway leading up to it. The usual arrangement of small houses had been adopted, and the stairs to the attic were directly above those leading down to the basement, thereby minimizing the space required. While standing at the attic doorway with a stack of newspapers in his arms, which he had accumulated in anticipation of their convenience in starting fires in the autumn, he made the dismaying discovery which, in view of subsequent developments, may be considered the primary episode of the incredible drama. Fortunately his immediate remarks were not repeated to Brinton; so we are not obliged to record them.

The Gladstone bag was at his side of the room directly across from the doorway, with a bright shaft of September sunlight revealing each detail of the vandalism. An entire corner had been chewed away. Meredith could easily see into the exposed interior. The bag was ruined, if not beyond repair, certainly beyond satisfactory restoration. Yet, surprisingly, at the conclusion of his angry recountal, Meredith's tone changed to a heavy chuckle. "It won't happen again, that's a certainty. The piece of bread I put there had enough poison on it to kill a dozen rats. He'll probably get it while I'm away."

It was about 11 p.m. when Meredith reached home. No sooner had he entered the hall than he heard the sounds from overhead, an irregular series of ghoulish thumps, evidently originating in the attic. His first thought was that the rat was on the attic floor, threshing convulsively in death agony. He hastily returned to the garage, selected his heaviest hammer, reentered the house, and sprang up the stairs. He paused briefly at the top landing, clicked on the outside light switch, and swung open the door.

The room was unmistakably empty!

For a moment he could scarcely credit the testimony of his senses. Then, as he stepped into the room, the real situation became evident. The rat was *within* the flooring. Meredith seemed able to feel the movement beneath his feet as the dying beast lunged about within the restricted confines of its vault.

The prospects confronting Meredith were dismaying. No doubt the rat would die within an hour or two, but decomposition would promptly set in, and the resulting odor of decay would be unbearable. He appeared to have no choice except to tear up a considerable section of the floor as his first duty of the next morning.

But he was wrong on every point. Except for intervals of silence, some brief, others so prolonged that he was sure the animal had expired, the thumps persisted for three days, though with declining vigor during the final stage. Death, when it came, was sudden—and horribly revelatory.

MEREDITH was in the house at the time. The kicking thud was feeble, yet noticeably stronger than those immediately preceding it, thereby capturing his attention. He paused in his housework, listening intently. The movement he had just heard may have been provoked by terror; for it was quickly followed by a wild scurrying patter of tiny feet, a thin fluttering scream, and an avid chorus of excited chattering. The dying rat had been finished off and promptly eaten by a horde of starving comrades. The slithering scraping emanating from the east corner of the house, the part closest to the island, indicated the departure of the rodent army. Until this moment the idea that he was confronted with the problem not of single rat, but of a number of them, had never occurred to Meredith.

He felt of his forehead. It was clammy with the chill sweat of an emotion akin to fear. Rising anger drove away every other sentiment. Evidently the bungalow was not quite the bargain he had originally supposed, nor had he been as shrewd a businessman as he liked to picture himself. And the worst was to come. The onset of cold weather and the disappearance of vegetation would bring the seasonal migration of rodents from the woods and open spaces to buildings and other shelters. His house was a veritable focus of their attention locally. Unless he hit upon a scheme to combat the threatening plague, he was due for some decidedly unpleasant experiences. Meredith had no doubt of his capacity to devise such a scheme once he put his mind to the task.

He promptly dismissed the idea of a cat.

He was proud of his dislike for cats. He regarded his hostility toward the felidae as proof of rugged masculine virtue. In any event, his combative impulses had been stirred up, and he wished to be directly responsible for the job.

His method was ingenious, modern, and, as he was sure, efficient. It was the outcome of his conviction that rats, despite their appearance of alertness and adaptability, were essentially unthinking instinct-controlled automatons. Brinton's counter-arguments—somewhat better-informed arguments than Meredith's, it may be said, had been without any effect in modifying his confidence in his belief. The remarkable success of the trap, when put into use, appeared as undeniable evidential proof of the rightness of his opinion, and, as Brinton soon found, Meredith was not the type to abstain from indulging in "I-told-you-so's."

THE trap was established amidst a tangle of willows to the rear and east of the bungalow. The first feature was simple, even crude. It consisted of a train of molded hard-rubber battery cases which Meredith picked up from a junk heap. By knocking out both ends and the inner leaves he was left with a number of dull black frames of suitable size. These were laid in a row, end-to-end, closed top upward, along a gray weather-stained board which rested in a shallow trench. Sheets of tar paper were thrown over the frames. Loose earth was heaped over top of all.

The result was a narrow gloomy tunnel. In Meredith's view, no rat could resist the invitation presented by either opening of the heavily shadowed passageway. Natural selection has endowed rats with a congenital tendency to explore abandoned water pipes, tubing, or shafts, provided they are enclosed, and if the entranceway is small. In these circumstances they are free of the danger of encountering creatures larger and more formidable than themselves, and the increase in their range of search for food may result in the discovery of new sources of supply, thus often saving the creatures from extinction by famine. In taking advantage of this in-bred propensity of his enemy, Meredith had the right idea. But he should have made allowances for the possibility that, in some exceptional rats, intelligence, responding to severe need, might be capable of dominating instinct.

Death was a near-certainty for any rat which extended its search to the middle of the tunnel, for here the unusual trap came into operation.

We may safely conjecture that Doctors Guillotin and Louis would have exclaimed with delight at their first glimpse of the mechanism. It represented the ultimate development of their invention. Then, on second thought, they might have been less happy. For they conceived of guillotining as instantaneous, painless, and dignified. This last consideration represented an ideal of importance to them. They wished to minimize the ignominy of execution, to make the act of death decent, even if necessary. The use of a guillotine, even a miniature one, to halt a plague of rats would have displeased them mightily. But the merits of the device were, otherwise, undeniable.

It consisted of the blade of a butcher's cleaver set in rails and controlled by a simple type of photo-electric cell. When the head of the advancing rat intercepted the cross-beam of invisible light, the blade was released, and he was decapitated. Such, at least, was the theory; a few adjustments were necessary before practice was brought into strict conformity with the theoretical standard.

Among the first twenty or thirty victims, Meredith found many with the body on one side of the blade, the head on the other. The eyes, in particular, attracted his attention. He studied them with a curiosity which, as he admitted to himself, was a bit pathological in its intensity. In life the eyes were shining convex lenses of vitreous jet. Now they were slightly crumpled, tarnished, and opaque; the pupils showed as creamy pin-points, like morbid alien growths, or spots of diseased tissue.

The other executions were not so neat. The rat might be cut in half; effective enough, to be sure, but aesthetically dissatisfying. Then, again, the face might be sliced away, or the nose, or the hindquarter. Rats are hardy and tough; the ones hacked up in this fashion usually managed to drag themselves out of the tunnel before collaps-

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ing. A rare few escaped with no more damage than a lost tail.

Meredith tinkered with the beam control until, as consecutively indicated by the bodies of each of the most recent victims, he was justified in concluding that the arrangement was perfect. No reasonable critic could have found fault with the appearance of the severed remains.

"They'll get it, every one of 'em," Meredith boasted; and the rats did get it, one after another, with precision and despatch. Meredith was immensely pleased; he was confident he had mastered the problem. "It's just a matter of a few weeks before I've cleaned out the whole outfit."

The biologist, in interpreting Meredith's success, would have spoken of innate nerve pathways of low resistance, determined by inheritance, which controlled the rats' behavior and sent them to their death; but, if he did not care whether he wasted his time or not, he could also have gone on to explain to Meredith that the radical modification of those habits was a regular accomplishment in laboratories—and possibly in nature also.

HAVING attained the desired results, Meredith began to lose interest, and he visited the trap less frequently. Consequently he no longer saw the bodies of the victims, for their cannibalistic companions devoured them upon discovery, even including the skeletons, apparently, since these were likewise gone. But smears on the blade, and the fact that it was down, left no doubt of what had happened. Determined not to desist in his efforts until the colony was eradicated entirely, and conscious of his growing carelessness (for lack of novelty had pretty well spoiled the fun of the game), Meredith set a regular schedule for himself; and, being the man he was, he stuck to it. He even established a routine system for re-sharpening the blade.

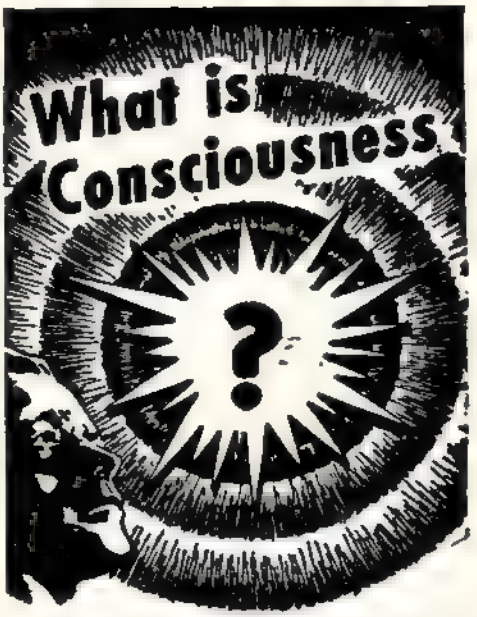
The sheer regularity of the affair—its monotonous pattern—may be the explanation of the effect ultimately produced in Meredith; just as a repeated mild impulse—the delicate pressure of a child's finger—can, if properly timed, make the mast of a mighty ship shudder in vibrations of dangerous amplitude. Will sufficiently frequent

performance of an action, or some types of action, even when accomplished with indifference, produce, in the long run, a thought pattern in the brain? Whatever the explanation, by the time winter came, Meredith was already beginning to dream fitfully; something he had rarely known in his life before.

He related the dream to Brinton, not once, but often. Since the dream never varied, except in trivial details, Brinton may be forgiven if he took to dodging out the side door whenever, through the front window, he caught sight of Meredith approaching the entranceway of the Club. Repetition apart, the dream was peculiarly interesting, and it may provide substance for amateur psycho-analysts.

Meredith found himself enshrouded by an almost impenetrable murky gloom. The familiar phrase, "as dark as the grave," came into his mind, bearing with it a latent inexplicable significance which baffled and confused his understanding. His next, and more reasonable, efforts of thought trickled, as it were, over his original notion, slowly dissolving it away, until his improving mental vision revealed that he was in a cavern, something akin to the one he had constructed for the rats, but on a larger scale. He sought to turn back; then, in a sudden gust of panic, he realized that he did not know in which direction he was walking. If he turned around, he might be facing the wrong way, going toward the *center* of the tunnel. He knew, without the necessity of any analysis, that death—swift, merciless, certain—would be the price of error. Trembling with irresolution, his heart pounding frantically, he halted in his tracks; and, as he did so, he understood the situation—or, by the magic of dream, he had been transported in a twinkling to another realm.

HE WAS not in a tunnel, he was ascending a flight of straight steps; he had no choice but to go up, up, up. The inner psychic drive refused to be denied; he was compelled to obedience, like a frightened rat who senses danger, but pushes hesitantly onward, not quite able to bring himself to halt—and then it is too late. He resumed his advance, but at a slower pace, for his



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feet dragged unwillingly. Where was he going? His hands were manacled behind his back; his neck was collarless. The meaning was plain: he was about to be executed—to be hung. But, no, that could not be right. No scaffold was ever built as high as this.

He was about to be decapitated on a guillotine!

The answer came as a lightning flash of truth, yet his mind strove to reject the idea. Had he not seen ugly pictures of such an execution, with the criminal standing on the ground, level with the audience? The argument was worthless and without the slightest consolation value, for he remembered that the condemned men and women of the Revolutionary Terror in France were compelled to mount a platform. This was done to afford a good view to every member of the audience. But who was interested in seeing him die? Of what crime did they deem him guilty? Yet, unmistakably, he heard the squeaky applause; a shrill exultant tide of rejoicing, a queer, high-pitched, gleeful cadence, a swelling murmur of bestial triumph.

Then he was awake, shaking in a spasm of terror, with the eerie babble of joy still faintly sounding in his ears. For a moment he felt that the cries were not a part of the dream at all, that they had awakened him, and had ceased as he struggled to regain consciousness. Several times he was almost certain that he caught a few lingering echoes, distant whispers, dying fretfully away to nothingness as he strove to hear them. The subsequent silence was flawless, and, as he endured it, he became convinced he had imagined the sounds, that the dream was a beginning and end in itself, and the squealing cries were an integral part of it.

The December nights were dark and cloudy. Dusk arrived early in the afternoon, and evening followed soon after, and Meredith, who had become ever less willing to endure loneliness, invariably hurried through his quickly-prepared supper and hastened away either to a movie or the Club. One night, on a sudden impulse, he visited the trap before leaving home. As he expected, the trap had been sprung. A frozen stain on the blade gave silent testimony that, again, it had not failed of its purpose.

Meredith swiftly dismantled the trap and carried the parts into the garage. He admitted to Brinton that he was unable to explain or justify his behavior. But, for whatever reason, he felt much relieved. Several days elapsed, and he found he was beginning to sleep better; the dreams grew infrequent, they were less real, and their quality of terror faded away.

AS FATE or misfortune would have it, one bright January morning Meredith carelessly directed the field glasses on the island in the midst of the frozen stream, something he had not done for considerably beyond a month. It was an idle gesture in response to a passing notion, and he did not expect any results from his search. He had often looked before, especially after the coming of the early winter snows, and, despite the leafless state of the willows and the exposure permitted by the bleak, stringy, sere grass, he had seen nothing. So he had given up the habit. Still, he had not finished off the rats, and he supposed a few ought to be somewhere around. Thus he vaguely reasoned; but he hoped otherwise, and he more than half-expected his optimism was justified by the fact. The glasses suddenly wabbled in response to the trembling weakness of his hand. With an effort, he steadied himself, and gazed at the three rats.

Their size, for one thing, was disturbing. Though not super-giants of their breed, they were large, and their glossy bulk bespoke good health. Meredith, attempting to think calmly and rationally, told himself this was not surprising: they were among the several remaining survivors of an originally large number, and their habits of cannibalism were sufficient to explain their well-fed condition. In a way, it was the best proof that he had been getting results, and that he had been ill-advised to abandon his program. But the eyes of the rats! The luminous glow beneath the blackmirrored surface suggested a striking combination of savagery and intelligence.

Meredith tossed the glasses down on the window ledge, spun about, and crossed the room to his gun case. Less than five minutes later, breathing heavily, he sprang up on the bank of the island. Even when telling the

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story to Brinton, he did not realize that his behavior was identical with that of the Baluta brothers, and was no less deserving of contemptuous criticism. The results, too, were in accordance. He encountered not a single rat. But he found something.

In the middle of the island, in a shallow bowl-shaped depression about the dimensions of a truck tire, he found the answer to his vaguely formulated question about the fate of the rodent skeletons. Hundreds of them lay before him in confused disarray. With a shudder, he leaned forward, carefully scrutinizing the ghastly debris. Each skull, with exception, had been sharply cut away from the body skeleton. He himself was the one ultimately responsible for the creation of this charnal pit!

Meredith fled precipitately from the island.

When he left the Club that night, the hour was late, and the attendant had to offer some broad hints before the laggard could be persuaded to depart. But he felt a trifle better, having succeeded in capturing Brinton and regaling him with a minute description of his latest experience, which is always a good means of easing one's mental distress. His long-suffering audience had eventually protested that, after all, he was a married man, and, as such, had his obligations; and, after promising to call in the morning (more concerned, if the truth be to recover his field glasses than for Meredith's welfare), he had abandoned his distraught companion to his own devices. Meredith's agitation, though natural enough, did not, after all, seem to make much genuine sense. Nobody but an imaginative lunatic, or a genius, would have conceived that the man was confronted by real danger.

It was about noon when Brinton walked up the short gravelled path to the front door of Meredith's bungalow. The blinds were drawn down. As the ornithologist crossed the low verandah, his heart was already beginning to thud with a premonition of disaster, though there was not yet the slightest indication of what was to be encountered. Up to this moment he had been alternately bored and amused by Meredith's recital of his woes; now, in a quick revulsion of feeling, Brinton found that he dreaded to enter

the house. It was a conscious physical effort to seize the doorknob and turn it.

The door was unlocked. Brinton left it ajar as he stepped inside. The house was warm, even stuffy, and the cool breeze through the doorway was refreshing. Pale winter sunlight streamed in, too, and by its aid—or perhaps motivated by a subconscious understanding of the course of events—the ornithologist almost instantly saw the broken condition of the top landing of the flight of steps leading to the attic. Heedless of possible danger, Brinton ran up the stairs, and looked through the gaping hole in the shattered boards into the basement below. By bending to one side, he could see Meredith's body at the bottom of the cellar steps; what was left of it, anyway.

It wasn't much. The ravenous rats had stripped their victim acid-clean. At the coroner's inquest, identification was made certain by means of a bone scar left as the result of an operation. A few shreds of tendons and the moist condition of the periosteum coating the bones proved the recency of death. Otherwise there was nothing but a naked skeleton completely bared by the sharp teeth of the hungry rodents. The same creatures, no doubt, were responsible for gnawing away the woodwork of the top landing until it was reduced to matchbox frailty, so that it gave away beneath the pressure of Meredith's foot, plunging him into the cellar below.

Sometime during the night, Meredith must have risen from his sleep, responding to an inconceivable kind of dream summons, like an irresistible command, or an impulse to instinctive action generated by the excitement of a nightmare; and, without turning on the lights, he marched across the room, up the gloom-enshrouded steps, and plunged to his death.

A few of the more lurid newspaper accounts spoke of his engaging in a desperate struggle in the blackness of the cellar until, overcome by the number and fury of his small assailants, he had gone down to defeat; after which the victors had indulged in their triumphal banquet. Oddly enough, the medical report was unable to settle this point decisively, though the somewhat less spectacular conclusion, that he had broken his

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neck in striking the cement floor, appeared likely correct. The uncertainty was, in a measure, caused by the fact that Meredith's head was missing. It had been chewed away from the body and was to be found nowhere around.

Brinton was the one who solved the mystery of its disappearance. The clue, when disclosed, at once suggested the solution. In a dusty corner occurred a break in the basement wall, a hole considerably larger than required for the passage of rats, but of a size to accommodate a human head, providing ear, nose, and other protruding features were removed. The next step was obvious.

Sure enough the fleshless skull was where it might have been expected to be—in the midst of the charnal pit on the island. Somehow, it looked quite at home, Brinton thought, as he stood trembling in every limb staring down. Brinton forced himself to pick up the skull, the while keeping his flagging courage up by murmuring some unfeeling witticism to the effect that he, at least, believed in returning possessions to their rightful place and owner.

If any rats were present, the ornithologist did not see them. Several weeks after the inquest, however, he called on the Baluta brothers, and they informed him, with an air of self-satisfaction and congratulation, that the colony had indeed disappeared.

Yet the rats had not been killed off. Far from it. Meredith's gruesome death is proof enough of that. It is also a testimony to the greatness of their number. Nor is it likely they succumbed to disease, as such creatures occasionally do. Meredith's final descriptive words to Brinton contradict this interpretation. No, the chances are that they, or their descendants, survive to this day. Instead of breaking up and dispersing, the members of the colony, because of their co-operative dependency on one another, may have maintained their communal relationship. If so, where are they? They may return to revenge themselves on the Baluta brothers. Or perhaps Brinton, who other Club members will tell you has become both furtive and fearful, will find them in his own neighborhood . . . in the dark places of his own house.

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